From the Street to the Stadium and Back Again?

An Analysis of the Neoliberalisation of Skateboarding Following its Inclusion into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Rhys Gazeres de Baradieux, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Rhys Gazeres

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Abstract

Using an interrelated mixed-methods approach, this thesis explores how skateboarding's introduction into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is 'neoliberalising' the practice. It does so through three analytical chapters that explore the governance of skateboarding, the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding event broadcasts, and grassroots skateboarding. Informed by Foucault, I characterise contemporary sport as an example of neoliberal governmentality, working to integrate market logics into everyday values and norms through the production of discourse. I thus draw attention to how themes of competitive individualism, performance maximisation, and rationalisation are becoming more salient throughout the spaces of skateboarding as a result of its Olympic debut.

However, as neoliberalism continues to stamp its mark throughout the social realm, practices are emerging that challenge this, showcasing their resilient qualities and a desire to maintain their status quo. Skateboarding is one such example. Indeed, skateboarders are responding to the ongoing neoliberalisation of their practice through a strong commitment to its core values of community, creativity, comradery, and most importantly, a focus on fun and enjoyment. A second aim of this thesis is thus to bring to attention how skateboarders, despite the introduction of their practice into the Olympic Games, are showing resilience to this new development. Within these spaces, we find alternative modes of social organisation that offer more egalitarian futures.

This thesis therefore contributes to geographical debates on neoliberalisation, showing how sport works both as a site of everyday domination, but also as one for the enactment of ground-up initiatives that challenge the dominant order of discourse, allowing us to imagine futures that are not organised by injustice.

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List of Abbreviations

FIRS	Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports
IF	International Federation
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISF	International Skateboarding Federation
ISJC	International Skateboarding Judging Commission
NF	National Federation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPSO	Non-profit Sport Organisation
OCOG	Organising Committee of the Olympic Games
OM	Olympic Movement
SLS	Street League Skateboarding
WCS	World Cup Skateboarding
WSIJP	World Skate International Judging Program

1: Introduction

On 7th September 2013, at the 125th International Olympics Committee (IOC) session in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Tokyo was selected as the host city of the 2020 Olympics Games ahead of Istanbul and Madrid, the other two candidate cities. Tokyo won the final round of IOC voting, beating Istanbul by 60 votes to 36, whilst Madrid was eliminated in the first round ballot (BBC, 2013). The Tokyo Summer Games were originally scheduled to take place from 24th July to 9th August 2020. On the morning of 24th March 2020 however, a conference call was held by Thomas Bach and former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo following an IOC executive board meeting on the 22nd March. This was joined by the President of the Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG), Mori Yoshiro; the Governor of Tokyo Koike Yukiro, the Olympic Minister Hashimoto Seiko and other IOC officials. The decision was made to postpone the Games of the XXII Olympiad in Tokyo to a date beyond 2020 but no later than summer 2021 due to the rising risks of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For the IOC, 'the Olympic flame would now become the light at the end of the tunnel in which the world finds itself at present' (Tokyo 2020, 2020; *np*). The Tokyo 2020 Games eventually took place on 23rd July – 8th August 2021, but still under the banner of Tokyo 2020. This was the second time that Tokyo has hosted the Summer Olympics Games, the first of which was in 1964, as well as the fourth Olympics to be held in Japan, with the Winter Olympics held in Sapporo in 1972 and 1998 in Nagano.

Today, major sports and events such as the Olympic Games occupy more and more of our time, money, energy and emotions. Last year, for example, we saw the 2022 Men's FIFA World Cup take place in Qatar from 20th Nov to 18th December. A few months before, on 8th August 2022, the Commonwealth Games came to a close in Birmingham before they re-open in Victoria, Australia in 2026. Until then, we will see the postponed 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023, the 2023 African Games in Ghana and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Meanwhile, annual competitions such as the USA's NFL Super Bowl, the Six Nations Rugby Championships, the Golf Masters Tournament, and the tennis Wimbledon Championships will take place each year. This is just a fraction of the hundreds if not thousands of organised sporting events that occur around the world each year. Some of the governing bodies involved in these events measure their annual turnover in billions, whilst individual professionals frequently earn more in one year than most people will earn over the course of their lives.

Modern sports are thus no longer a simple source of leisure for fans or participants. Rather, they exist as 'mega-events'; that is, ritualised, rationalised, hugely institutionalised, and commercialised spectacles that gather audiences of incredible numbers around the world (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). For Whannel (2009), these events no longer exist solely in the stadium, but have become media events on a global scale; they are covered on television, radio broadcasts and newspaper headlines around the world, taking place as a dispersed form of spectacle with an international reach. They appear in stadiums, bars, city squares, parks, clubs, beaches and communal screens around the world to the point in which the reach of these events is almost limitless. As a result, sports have become an intrinsic part of everyday life and identity (Cashmore, 2003). The FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, for example, have become an incredibly strong source of nationalism for countless individuals around the globe (Tomlinson and Young, 2006). In the case of football, Porat (2010) argues that supporting a local football club often becomes a life-long project that begins at an early age and ends with the life of the fan. Moreover, the broadcasts over the course of some of these mega-events can reach thousands and an audience that regularly amounts to the billions (Madrigal et al., 2005). At the same time, mega-events are used as strategies of urban entrepreneurship, and have a key role in urban development, place-branding, and tourism (Hall, 2006). In addition to all this large-scale development, sports programmes are frequently used for social development amongst youth that face challenges of poverty, oppression, war, or natural disaster (Coakley, 2011b).

1.1: Politicising Sport

Whilst such forms of sport are generally seen as a normal part of everyday life, they are in no way natural. Nor are they politically neutral. Instead, modern sports are highly constructed phenomena, driven by economic, political, and ideological motives. This is as true as it is for the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome as it is for the late capitalist societies in the contemporary Western world (Tomlinson and Young, 2006). Indeed, as Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) argue, modern sports have developed in line with the logic of capitalist modernity to the point where they have become central to our capitalist society more generally. It is now the case that sport, and its ties with the international media and entertainment industries, as well as urban planning, community development, public welfare, international relations, production and consumption, individual and collective identity and more are all shaped by and continue to shape the contours of contemporary capitalism. Indeed, as Andrews (2004: 3) writes, 'it is inconceivable to think of sport as anything but an important arm of the global capitalist order'.

Whilst not everyone is a fan of sport, and to some it may seem just a triviality, sport does matter to big business and to those who drive these increasingly commercialised and globalised industries (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic has made this commitment to capitalism clear. In the run-up to the Tokyo 2020 Games, Japan, like the rest of the world, was still battling waves of the pandemic, witnessing rising infection rates as well as a slow roll-out of vaccines. Despite this, the IOC, the Tokyo 2020 OCOG, and the Japanese government all insisted that the Games will be held regardless. Firstly, this ran against professional medical advice, which stated 'plans to hold the Olympic and Paralympic games this summer must be reconsidered as a matter of urgency' (Shimizu et al., 2021: 1). 'The whole global community recognises the need to contain the pandemic and save lives', they continue, accusing organisers of 'holding Tokyo 2020 for domestic political and economic purposes' *(Ibid*: 1*)*. Likewise, national public concerns were also growing. In a May 2021 survey by Asahi Shimbun, 43% of respondents said the Olympics should be cancelled, whilst 40% thought they should be postponed again, meaning a small total of 14% wanted the Games to be held in 2021. This was down from 28% in April (Asahi Shimbun, 2021c). On top of this, a poll by Kyodo news in May 2021 showed that 87.7% of respondents were concerned that an influx of athletes and staff members from abroad may spread the virus (Kyodo News, 2021a), whilst 68% doubted that they could be held safely (Asahi Shimbun, 2021b).

Such negligence by the Tokyo 2020 organisers firstly shows blatant disregard for public health and opinion. It also shows the power that sport has in contemporary political economy and how it has come to be shaped by rampant commercialism to the point where staging sports events is more of an economic decision than anything else. The Nomura Research Institute, for example, estimated a bill of $17 billion if the Tokyo Games were cancelled (Kyodo News, 2021b). In other words, the economic costs would have simply been too much if the Games were not to happen. As well as this, postponement had already cost an estimated $3 billion, two-thirds of which was funded through public money (The Asahi Shimbun, 2021a), with Olympic sponsors providing an extra $192 million to bridge the gap that postponement had made in finances for the Games (Nikkei, 2020). This was not just about public money then, but about a web of stakeholders, all looking to reap the fabled economic benefits of the Olympic monolith.

This is not an isolated case, since today sport possesses little autonomy from profit-driven rhythms and regimes (Andrews, 2004). Eick (2010) has shown, for example, that despite its non-for-profit legal status, FIFA has turned used its World Cup to turn football into a globally available commodity, generating billions of dollars from sponsors, the sports and media industry and host nations and cities.

It is not just the sports themselves involved in this then, but also the vast network of commercial and industrial sectors that have become integrated with them.

Such reliance on capitalist industries has led to sport taking a specific form. Due to the profit-driven nature of private corporations and other stakeholders involved, sports must be as marketable as possible to increase economic benefits. In turn, sport events must be exciting and spectacular, transforming them into a spectator product with an exchange value (Vamplew, 2018). Indeed, vastly more people now watch sports than regularly play them. The basis for this is excitement and competition, leading to the spectacularisation of sport. Over recent decades then, we have seen the emergence of an overtly structured, institutionalised, competitive and often masculinised form of sport (Wheaton, 2004), characterised by quests for excellence and an overall pedestalling of determination and victory above all else. Within this framework, failure becomes a non-option, whilst the merits of training, bodily excellence and overcoming obstacles and opponents are the prime goal (Sheppard, 2019).

Now, the ultimate goal of every event is to recognise the superiority and skill of its winner (Frandson, 2014). In response, an expansive and intricate circuit of local, regional, national, and international events has been built up over time, along with the professionalisation of athletes and governing bodies and the international standardisation of rules and regulations. In this sense, sport is socially constructed, built through the visions of its organisers. It is thus an object worth of critical study. This is in opposition to the essentialist terms that characterise sport as a universally beneficial innate expression of human nature (Coakley, 2011a). Indeed, sport as a universal and natural force for good is an idea often touted by sport monoliths themselves. The IOC (2021c: *np*) for example, state the purpose of the Olympic Movement (the governing force of the Games) is 'to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport, practised in accordance with Olympism and its values'. Such notions undermine an awareness of sport as a form of social organisation that is commonly used to reaffirm processes of neoliberalisation (Coakley, 2011a).

1.2: Sport, Neoliberalism, and the Olympic Games

Realising the increasing relevance of competition and individualism in sport as a result of its commodification, Whannel (2008: 98) argues that sport offers 'a metaphor for lived experience under capitalism'. More than just a metaphor though, and as Coakley (2011a) writes, the presentation of sports in this way actually serves to foster neoliberal ideas and beliefs in society more generally. From

this perspective, sport is a contested cultural realm where structures and ideas are constructed, circulated, and consumed (Sheppard, 2019). Within this terrain, we see the proliferation of corporate sponsors, athletic elites, monopoly organisations, and strictly organised competitive and institutionalised structures that work to define the ways in which sport is understood in wider society (Coakley, 2011a). In this sense, such a form of sport influences the ways in which people think about and define sports more generally, as well as reinforces its market-based rationalities as taken-for-granted aspects of everyday life. This process has led modern sport to become a global, corporatized enterprise that preserves the interests of its organisers and commercial actors, whilst normalising such a sporting form in general (*Ibid.*). As such, sport can be viewed as a tool for generating consent for neoliberal market-based logics in everyday life (Morissette, 2014). As Whannel (2008: 98) argues, this type of sport provides 'the terrain on which the ideological elements of competitive individualism can be worked through' (Whannel, 2008: 98).

The Olympic Games is an exact example of such a form, and it has been fittingly cited as an example of neoliberalism's entrenchment into the sporting world (Nauright, 2014). The Olympics is governed by various institutions that together constitute the 'Olympic Movement' (OM). The IOC is the centre of the OM, whilst surrounding it are the various National Olympic Committees (NOC) and International and National Federations that together champion social justice and democracy. Following on from the rise of neoliberal economic strategies during the 1980s, however, the OM began to establish itself as a single, hegemonic institution with the power, authority, and capital to organise events and thereby define and maintain particular meanings about sport in the public realm, under the guise of promoting a common good. As such, it is argued that the Olympics is associated with the dissemination of neoliberal political ideology, the perpetuation of class distinction, and rampant commercialisation (Nauright, 2014). There are also many other reasons that the Olympics fits into the neoliberal narrative. As Hall (2006) argues, mega events such as the Olympic Games have assumed a key role in urban and regional marketing strategies, as well as other urban development strategies of place-making and urban entrepreneurialism. Additionally, increased securitisation and policing of the urban environment, the silencing of dissent and further marginalisation of the homeless before, during and after the Games are further ways in which the Olympics are aligned with neoliberal strategies (Kennelly, 2015). Planning and funding the Games also often results in the creation of public-private partnerships in which public money is rewarded to private companies, leading to the movement of capital away from the taxpayer towards Olympic sponsors and organisers (Boykoff, 2014).

Building on this body of work regarding neoliberalism and the Olympic Games, it is my contention that the Games also contribute to the neoliberal project through the ways in which they transform sports into neoliberalised formats and subsequently shape sporting practices and discourses. Indeed, as Batuev and Robinson (2018) write, the Olympic Games is the largest global sporting event and is thus the most significant actor in shaping contemporary forms and understandings of sport. To evidence how the Games work in this way, I use the example of skateboarding's debut inclusion into the Olympic Games. I show how skateboarding's inclusion into the Games is 'neoliberalising' the practice, shaping it in ways that mirror the contemporary neoliberal sports model and therefore showing how modern sporting institutions such as the IOC and its Games are contributing to the spread of neoliberalism throughout the social realm.

I have chosen skateboarding as culturally, the practice is very different from mainstream sports and does not easily fit the values of the OM. Instead, many everyday skateboarding practitioners have distanced themselves from competitive sport formats such as the Games (Batuev and Robinson, 2017). Indeed, many practitioners and academic commentators alike understand skateboarding as offering alternatives to mainstream sport (O'Connor, 2020; Borden, 2019a; Lombard, 2010; Chiu, 2009, Wheaton, 2004). Skateboarding is thus resemblant of what have been variously called 'lifestyle' or 'alternative' sports. These activities, it is argued, challenge the westernised model of sport under neoliberalism that is characterised by competitive, rule-bound, and strictly institutionalised forms (Wheaton, 2004; 2010). In contrast to such a form of sport, they are rarely characterised by competitive drive and often take place in spaces that lack regulation (Wheaton, 2004). As I will outline further in Section 2.3, these practices give hopeful examples of alternative forms of social organisation, providing rich grounds on which to practice a cooperative and community-based form of politics.

Indeed, in the case of skateboarding, practitioners place importance on community and cooperation over competition, and champion the shared performative components built around 'doing-it' rather than generating winners or losers (Willing et al., 2019). These values, I will argue, allow skateboarders to realise the collective joys of physical movement (described in this thesis through the concept of jouissance) in such a way that destabilises the dominant norms of competitive sport. As such, its inclusion into the Olympics provides a timely opportunity to re-examine these values in the face of its further incorporation into the neoliberal sports system. Throughout this thesis then, I show how skateboarding is becoming neoliberalised, but also how skateboarders are maintaining a commitment to the practice's values and norms, showing resilience to this process of neoliberalisation.

1.3: Skateboarding's Inclusion into the Games

Skateboarding was formally introduced into the Olympics in 2016, when the IOC agreed to the addition of skateboarding, surfing, sports climbing, karate, and baseball/softball and surfing in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Programme. For the Tokyo 2020 OCOG, these sports were representative of traditional and emerging youth-focused events that are popular in both Japan and internationally (Tokyo 2020, 2015). Skateboarding's inclusion into the Games, as well as the other new sports and events, was done to realise part of the 'Olympic Agenda 2020'. Published in December 2014 through a collaborative effort involving 14 working groups consisting of OM stakeholders and outside experts, the Agenda consists of 40 separate yet interrelated recommendations whose purpose was to strengthen the IOC and the OM, safeguard the Olympic values and strengthen the role of sport in society by introducing changes intended to make the Olympic Games fit for the future. A key facet of the Agenda was a renewed focus on youth and urban sports, in order to counter a declining viewership amongst this demographic. Indeed, the median age of U.S. viewers for the 2008 Beijing Olympics was 47, rising to 48 for the 2012 London Games and 53 for the 2016 Rio Games. There was also a 30% drop in TV viewers between the ages of 18-34 from the London to Rio Games (Flint and Vranica, 2016).

Whilst the IOC has made various efforts to attract younger audiences over the past decades through the incorporation of youth-orientated activities such as windsurfing or mountain biking for the summer programmes and snowboarding in the winter programme, the Agenda marks an intensification of this since Thomas Bach's inauguration as IOC President in 2013 (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018). This move shows that the OM's main concern in the contemporary era is how to remain relevant to younger generations, and therefore audiences, who are practising and consuming sport differently to previous generations (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018). A key initiative of the Olympic Agenda 2020 was thus the granting of permission to OCOGs to make proposals for the inclusion of one or more new sports and events for the Olympic programme for the first time in Olympic history. This would, the IOC (2016) argue, give OCOGs the flexibility to propose new sports for their respective Games, allowing them to focus in on youth sports and innovation within the Olympic programme in ways that are relevant to the circumstances of their time and place.

Ultimately then, skateboarding was included in the Games, along with the other new sports, as a marketing decision. Indeed, as IOC President Thomas Bach (IOC, 2016; *np*) said, 'we want to take sport to the youth. With the many options that young people have, we cannot expect any more that

they will come automatically to us. We have to go to them'. As such, skateboarding is being used by the IOC as a space for capital accumulation, and so is being incorporated into a system of capitalist social relations (Havery, 2003). For this reason, skateboarding must be formatted and presented in a way that fits with the Olympic system, bringing it further into the sporting system that demands all sport be spectacularised and competitive. The result is a neoliberalised form of skateboarding. This is the point of departure for this PhD, namely that through its integration into the Olympic Games, skateboarding is being pulled further into the neoliberal sport system, being reorganised in the ways demanded by contemporary neoliberal sport models. By becoming integrated into this system, it also becomes a tool for reinforcing such a form of sport as a taken-for-granted norm and consequently as a tool for reinforcing the hegemony of neoliberal logics in wider society.

This is not the first example of skateboarding's neoliberalisation, however. Indeed, as Borden (2019a) shows, commercial competitions have existed within skateboarding since the 1960s, and today it revolves around a core industry of brands, media, celebrities, and competitions, all of which shape skateboarding culture (O'Connor, 2020). There are, for example, competitions such as Street League Skateboarding (SLS), or the X Games, as well as elite celebrity performers such as Nyjah Huston, Yuto Horigome and Aurelian Giraud. But as Schwier and Kilberth (2019: 9) note, 'with the inclusion in the Olympic Program 2020, skateboarding reaches the interim peak of progressive development into a competitive sport'. For Cantin-Brault (2019), becoming an Olympic sport is the rational conclusion of this decades-long process of incorporation, whereby the sport of competitive skateboarding has become a finalised end product. It is, he argues the 'final nail in the coffin of its reification' (Cantin-Brault, 2015: 65). There is thus a clear understanding from within skateboarding that the Games will lead to changes within the practice.

1.4: The Research Project

In order to examine the neoliberalisation of skateboarding, I draw on the geographical work that characterises neoliberalism as a transformative, ongoing and contextually contingent process (Springer, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002). To highlight the political implications of this, I then adopt Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism. Foucault characterises neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, which is concerned with the study of technologies of power, thus highlighting the methods that governments and other actors deploy in order to mould citizens into productive members of society (Cahill et al., 2018). Here, social and political forces guide the formation of certain discourses that in turn run through the social realm, creating systems of knowledge and truth,

defining the limits of possibility and thereby materialising unequal operations of power (Cole et al., 2004). In terms of neoliberalism, this refers to the production of discourses centred around market logic, organising society through notions of open competition, meritocracy, and individual liberty that all contribute to the well-being of the market. With such an understanding of neoliberalism in mind, I characterise sport as a mode of neoliberal governmentality due to its tendencies to contribute to the production of neoliberal discourse in wider society through its emphasis on competitive individualism. Through skateboarding's further neoliberalisation then, I argue that the practice is in turn becoming an object of governmentality.

As neoliberalism works its way through society in this way however, communities and practices are emerging that denounce this process. One of the ways in which this is occurring is through the praxis of resilience (Katz, 2001; 2004). Here, resilience refers to an effort to continue with everyday life despite systems of domination such as neoliberalism (Grove and Chandler, 2017). Within these sites, one can find the power and potential of self-organisation, allowing realisations of alternative ways of organising social life that aren't centred around self-interest. Skateboarding has been praised as one such resilient practice, denouncing the norms and values of neoliberal sport despite its ongoing incorporation into this system (Schweer, 2019). Indeed, as Borden (2019a) writes, competition has never been the defining characteristic of skateboarding, with practitioners instead choosing to value community, creativity and most simply the enjoyment found within the act of skateboarding over anything else. As such, alongside an analysis of how skateboarding is becoming neoliberalised, I also examine resilience within skateboarding, highlighting the ways that skateboarders are working to preserve skateboarding's overarching alternative ethos' *despite* its inclusion into the Olympic Games, and instead offering counter-discourses and possibilities for more egalitarian ways of being. Together then, this thesis gives a detailed examination of what is happening in skateboarding at both the institutional and grassroots level because of its inclusion into the Games, revealing the processes and tensions that are appearing as a result.

With this in mind then, the PhD tackles the following set of research questions:

- What institutional processes are occurring within skateboarding's governance as a result of the Olympic Games and how are these working to introduce neoliberal logics into skateboarding?
- What type of media product does such governance serve to create, and how is this involved in the production and dissemination of neoliberal discourse?

- How do the neoliberal discourses produced by skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics affect the grassroots?
- How are skateboarders showing resilience to these processes of neoliberalisation, and what alternative ways of organisation does this offer?

In order to answer these, the PhD is split into three analytical themes. Each theme will be discussed in a separate analytical chapter that will show how skateboarding is being neoliberalised in each instance. The chapters appear in a specific order, with each building on the themes of the previous. The chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 4 - Producing Neoliberal Sport: When a new sport enters the Games, it must be represented by a single international federation whilst each participating nation must have its own NF. The role of these, in short, is to curate an international competition framework and qualification system and to select and train athletes at a national level. They thus work together to create the legislation and framework that push skateboarding closer to the traditional modern competitive sport model, and therefore work to reinforce the primacy of competitive sport in everyday life. This chapter thus tracks the changes that have occurred in skateboarding's governance at the international level and in the UK as a result of its inclusion into the Olympic Games, showing how the newly established policies and actions of these organisations are serving to create a neoliberalised format of Olympic skateboarding.

- Chapter 5 - Presenting Neoliberal Sport: This next analytical chapter examines skateboarding's debut on the Olympic Stage, analysing each of the four televised events broadcast by the BBC. This chapter draws attention to the techniques used to render skateboarding a mediatised spectator product, highlighting the political implications embedded in this process. In doing so, it reveals the production of neoliberal discourses as it occurs in the events through an attention to the meanings and values ascribed to skateboarding through commentary and media framing. With the theme of resilience in mind however, this chapter also shows how the participating skateboarders give examples of resilience to this process, with their actions and comportments offering counter-discourses that destabilise the event's emphasis on competitive individualism.

- Chapter 6 - Practising Neoliberal Sport?: This final analytical chapter examines how the discourses produced by such institutional organisations and media framing run through the

grassroots of skateboarding. On one hand, it shows how three UK-based skateboarding NPSOs are relating to the Olympic Games and how it is affecting their actions, forcing them to align themselves more closely with the neoliberal ethos of the Games in order to gain greater attention from local planners and media outlets. It also shows how the practices of everyday skateboarders can become increasingly neoliberal. On the other hand, this chapter shows how these NPSOs, as well as grassroots skateboarders and brands, are resilient to this, continuing with their general anti-competitive ethos despite the forces that work to define skateboarding in competitive terms.

Over recent decades, there have been various attempts to show the relevance of sport to the field of human geography. John Bale's (1989) *Sports Geography,* for example, shows how sport is relevant to core geographical concepts such as space, place, globalisation, imagination, and identity. More recently, Koch's (2017) work has shown sport's relevance to the themes of geopolitics, urban space, identity, community, and labour. Following this, Andrews (2017) has shown how sport aligns well with the tenants of non-representational theory, focusing on themes of performance and immediacy. Finally, Latham and Layton (2020) argue that amateur sport practices can enliven and enrich the urban environment, whilst Koch (2018) has demonstrated the relevance of sports to issues within urban geography through the lenses of post-colonialism, identity, and neoliberalism. Whilst geographical work on sport is clearly relevant to the discipline in a variety of ways then, studies of sport are few and far between, and a coherent sub discipline of 'sports geography' is yet to fully established. Koch (2017) argues that this is due to a stigma that characterises sports geography as lacking in rigour.

As Anderson (2017a) has argued, however, a key concern within critical cultural geography is the examination of power relations and their materialisation in a range of contexts. Advancing that emphasis, I argued that critical attention to the contemporary sport landscape is a key arena for such cultural politics. Indeed, as has been noted, contemporary sport is characterised by a dual nature, manifesting as sites of routine mechanised existence and everyday domination on the one hand, and sites of joy and creativity that challenge this on the other (Carrington, 2009; Eichberg, 2010). By its very nature then, sport should be a key area of interest for cultural geographers.

One aim of this thesis is to thus re-state the relevance of sport to cultural geographers. Indeed, through the examination of the neoliberalisation of skateboarding on one hand, and how skateboarders are showing resilience to this process on the other, I show one way in which these

relations of power play out. Using a Foucauldian approach, I show how skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics functions as a form of neoliberal governmentality, extending the reach of neoliberalism into the realms of everyday life. Through skateboarding's presence as a resilient cultural practice however, I also show how the practice offers alternative understandings of physical movement. Through this dual approach, I make clear how geographers might approach sport and physical activity as a site everyday domination, as well as one for the enactment of more egalitarian, ground-up initiatives that challenge the dominant order of discourse and allow us to imagine futures that are not organised by injustice (Grove and Chandler, 2017).

Before moving further on however, it is important to address the presentation of skateboarding culture that I use throughout the thesis, and my own positionality in relation to this. To this end, it should be noted that I am writing primarily of a UK-based skate culture. Indeed, whilst skateboarding and its cultures are said to unite practitioners across the globe (Schwier and Kilberth, 2019), it is the case that within this, more localised cultures exist, found within different countries, towns, neighbourhoods and amongst people of different genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities and (dis)abilities. In this nature then, the ethnographic accounts presented in Chapter 6 gives London and Hertfordshire based accounts of skateboarding, much of which is built upon my experience in a predominantly white male skateboarding community. This will be explained further in Section 2.3.1 and 3.5.4.

Compositionally, this thesis follows a traditional format. What follows is thus a literature review of the relevant topics split into three parts: 'Neoliberalism' (2.1), 'Sports, Capitalism and Neoliberalism' (2.2), and 'Alternatives to the Neoliberal Sport Model' (2.3). Together, these explore in more detail the topics of neoliberalism, its relationship to sporting practice, the Olympic Games' position within this and finally how practices such as skateboarding can offer alternatives to this. From there, I will outline the methods used in the project (Chapter 3), followed by the three analytical chapters (4, 5, 6) and a conclusion (Chapter 7).

Overall then, whilst being critical of the Olympic Games and the neoliberal system of sport, the project is a hopeful one, showing how skateboarding can offer breaks within such systems of domination. Throughout the thesis, I hope to capture the vibrancy and essence of skateboarding and its surrounding cultures. I will show exactly what makes skateboarding so important to the millions of people that practice it globally, and whose lives and identities, like my own, have been almost completely built around this deceptively simple object.

2: Literature Review

2.1: Neoliberalism

Whilst today it is argued that 'neoliberalism is everywhere' (Venugopal, 2015: 165), it is only since the 1990s onwards that neoliberalism as a specific term began to receive a significant amount of critical academic attention. By the end of the 20th century however, it was generally accepted that neoliberalism's emphasis on free market ideology had found its way across the globe (Slobodian, 2018). Indeed, it has been described as 'the most powerful ideological and political project in global governance to arise in the wake of Keynesianism' (McCarthy and Prudham, 2003: 275) and has now been examined from 'cities to citizenship, sexuality to subjectivity and development to discourse' (Springer, 2012: 135). Whilst an exact definition may be difficult, Davies (2014) argues that understandings of neoliberalism generally share four standpoints:

- Victorian liberalism is viewed as an inspiration for neoliberalism.
- Neoliberal policy makes those institutions and activities that lie outside of the market its target, incorporating them into the market through privatisation, re-inventing them alongside market principles, or simply disbanding them altogether.
- To do this, the state must have some role, allowing access to those institutions that were previously closed off to the market.
- The ethos of neoliberalism is predicated upon competition, and thereby the production of inequality.

The term was and continues to be adopted mainly by critics of the perceived free market orthodoxy that was spreading across the globe under the auspices of the Washington Consensus (Davies, 2014). The 'Washington Consensus', coined by economist John Williamson in 1989 at the Institute for International Economics conference, was used as a label for ten policies that were supposedly 'needed in most Latin American countries at that time' (Williamson, 2004: 195). The principle aim of the Washington Consensus was to eliminate government intervention and the distortions that this supposedly entails in the economies of the crisis-hit Latin American countries, replacing them with an open, competitive, and thereby efficient market system (Lin, 2015). Indeed, the arguments defending neoliberalism are primarily economic ones, most notably that free markets are necessary for increased prosperity (Spence, 2015). Such an emphasis on lack of state intervention has been described as 'roll-back neoliberalism' (Peck and Tickell, 2007; Perreault and Martin, 2005).

The 1980s are ofttimes referred to as the defining period for neoliberalism, with the 1979 election of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan's election in the USA in 1981 (Cerny, 2008). Indeed, the 1980s are characterised by a wave of deregulation, privatisation and welfare-state withdrawal, all of which are intrinsic neoliberal traits (Venugopal, 2015). As Davies (2017b) highlights however, neoliberalism has a long history dating back to the 1920s, with the writings of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek and many others criticising the rationality of socialism and state intervention in the economic system. These individuals tasked themselves with the revival of the economic order of classical liberalism, or *laissez-faire*, a central tenant of which is the freedom and centrality of the individual. It refers to the theory of the minimal state, vindicating individual rights and freedom and offering protection against the perceived threat of the government towards these (Lomasky, 2002). It is then here that the supposed benefits of creativity, liberty, morality, equality, democracy, wealth and ultimately the progress of civilization lie (Mould, 2021). Whilst neoliberalism represents a departure from classical liberalism, the tenants of individual freedom do live on within it in many ways.

It follows then, that under neoliberal logic, private ownership is the foundation of a properly functioning market system and that failing publicly owned provisions can be corrected through privatization. Central to neoliberalism is thus a marketisation of the state similar to classical liberalism whereby private ownership gains increased importance over public ownership (Spence, 2015). This implies that neoliberalism is a gateway to a utopian world characterised by free markets and free individuals, liberated entirely from state intervention. This is not the case however, and contemporary evidence shows that neoliberalism actually entails a mode of state intervention whereby market rule is imposed upon all aspects of social life in order to restructure society in such a way that it benefits the well-being of the market, hence the departure from laissez-faire liberalism (Brown, 2015; Wacquant, 2012).

A consequence of this is that under neoliberalism, individuals are encouraged to be as productive as possible, ending in the marketisation of everyday life in which individuals are in competition with one another, just as businesses, corporations and the like are in the market economy (Boykoff, 2011). In this sense, individual freedom is not about liberty at all but about a wider process of subjectification and governmentality in which market logics become integrated into everyday norms and values, with all action becoming orientated towards individualised market-led outcomes and the undercutting of community power (Spence, 2015).

As this logic becomes more and more embedded into the fabric of society and our everyday lives, the constituent elements of democracy are hereby transformed into economic ones, whilst more radical democratic imaginations become increasingly difficult, if not impossible to both visualise and practice (Brown, 2015). The endpoint of this is the incorporation of individuals into a social order that offers a false promise of freedom, breaks down collective solidarity, and instead serves the interest of the market and therefore the maintenance of class power amongst the economic elite (Harvey, 2007). For Foucault (2008: 88) neoliberalism is thus 'a way of making capitalism work' that needs to be identified 'with permanent vigilance, activity and intervention'. Before a fuller explanation of the workings of this however, I will first outline the transition from classical liberalism to neoliberalism, highlighting the role of the Freiberg and Chicago schools in the formation of neoliberal ideals such as a lack of state intervention and the primacy of economic theories of competition.

2.1.1: From Liberalism to Neoliberalism

Classical liberalism is associated most closely with the Scottish economist Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (2009 [1776]) and the 'invisible hand' of the market. He argued that minimal state intervention in the economy leads to increased prosperity. This is not to say that classical liberalism advocated for the complete privatisation of all public goods and services, but that the state's role is to uphold no more than the most fundamental aspects of public order (Thorsen, 2010). As such, it focuses on the idea of limited government, the importance of private property, the responsibility of individuals over their own fates as well as the maintenance of rule of law. It is hostile towards the welfare state, whereby the welfare state is deemed to damage the ability of individuals to live freely (Ryan, 2007).

In the years following the 1920s, Mises, Hayek, and others tasked themselves with the revival of classical liberalism's economic order following its decline from a peak around the 1870s until its apparent death during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which stimulated significant political transformations in the USA (Skocpol, 1980). This decline was largely caused by the rise of trade unions, state-imposed social and economic policies, and anti-trust laws (Davies, 2014). The 1871 Trade Union Act in the UK, for example, established the legal status of trade unions, leading to a surge in trade union numbers across the country (Curthoys, 2004). Meanwhile, in Germany, there was a shift in the late 1870s from free trade to agricultural and industrial protectionism following declining votes for the liberal parties, led by increased numbers of voters from the agricultural sector (Lehmann, 2010). Perhaps most importantly however, the Great Depression in the USA stimulated 'The New Deal', a period of profound political restructuring in the USA enacted by President Roosevelt

between 1933-1936, aimed at enhancing national planning and administrative capability of the government (Foucault, 2008). This led to government intervention in almost every area of economic activity (Allen, 1991), with interventions in employment, health, unionisation, and education (Skocpol, 1980; Fass, 1983).

It is this point to which the origins of neoliberalism can be traced. Ludwig von Mises was contributing heavily to the 'socialist calculation debate' in Austria, which explored the effectiveness of a socialist society in the replication of performance of a capitalist society in absence of private ownership of the means of production (Greenwood, 2006). Mises argued against this, asserting the impossibility of rational economic calculation under socialism, despite earlier calculations that showed the equivalence of optimal allocation of resources under socialism and the equilibrium of a functioning competitive market system (*Ibid.*). Rational economics here meant choosing the most efficient method of production with an aim to minimise cost, an ability that socialism would lose due to lack of any basis on which to make this calculation (von Mises, 1963).

In 1935, Mises' student Freidrich von Hayek would contribute to this argument with *Collectivist Economic Planning*, containing two essays of his own, a reprint of von Mises' and contributions from others. The anxieties of these individuals were increasing during this period with the New Deal in the USA, and the rise of totalitarianism in Europe. Indeed, Hayek argued that the interventionist practices being adopted in the UK were leading it down a similar totalitarian path, not dissimilar to Nazi Germany (Hayek, 1944). In response, Louis Rougier and Louis Baudin founded *La Librairie de Médicis*, a Paris-based publisher, in 1937, publishing numerous books that shared disdain for interventionist policies (Brennetot, 2015). Amongst these authors was the general impression that the price mechanism allowed a decentralised path to prosperity. Indeed, *La Librarie* published Hayek's (1944) internationally successful *The Road to Serfdom.* Here, he argued that interventionist policies were isolating, and would cut the respective country from the current state of affairs through which the world was becoming a unit. As a consequence, certain goods that were previously available for low prices on the international market would become unavailable to domestic producers, thereby increasing domestic prices and reducing purchasing power. One year later, Rougier organised the Walter Lippman Colloquium in 1938, set up with the intent to discuss a renewal of liberalism and in which Economist Louis Marlio reportedly coined the term 'neoliberalism' (Brennetot, 2014).

Whilst the origin of neoliberal ideas can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century, it was not until Margaret Thatcher's and Ronald Reagan's elections in the UK (1979) and USA (1981) respectively that these ideas began to be worked into policy. Since, neoliberalism has come to dominate almost all aspects of western social life (Venugopal, 2015; Peck and Tickell, 2002). For Davies (2017b: xiv) neoliberalism generally refers to 'the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-endorsed norms'. It is widely agreed, however, in geography (McCarthy and Prudham, 2003), history (Slobodian, 2018), political theory (Davies, 2017b), international development (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009), and many other disciplines, that neoliberalism is a slippery concept, and remains difficult to concisely define due to its tendency to manifest in complex and sometimes contradictory ways (Harvey, 2007).

As a consequence, as scholars have begun to closely analyse neoliberalism over the last 30 years, multiple approaches have emerged. Birch (2015), for example, identifies seven distinct approaches to understanding neoliberalism:

- A Foucauldian approach, characterising neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality through which discourses are produced and reproduced.
- A Marxist approach, understanding neoliberalism as a hegemonic ideology circulated by an elite class, imposing a coherent program of interpretations and images of the world onto subordinate classes.
- An ideational approach, presenting neoliberalism as a product of think tanks and intellectuals.
- A historical and philosophical approach, analysing the evolution of economic theory and the organisational forms developed to sustain them.
- An institutional approach, arguing that institutions are the key variables that determine neoliberalism's form at different locales.
- A regulatory approach, emphasising the role of regulation and policy, most specifically between the 1980s to the financial crisis, in the entrenchment of neoliberalism.
- And finally, a geographical approach, that understands neoliberalism as an emergent, contingent, and contested process, emphasising its polyvalence.

There is also debate concerning the number of analytical approaches to neoliberalism. Flew (2014) identifies six different approaches, for example, whilst Ward and England (2007) identify four. Here, I use a Foucauldian approach, since this captures how states, private actors and citizens are produced through the creation and dissemination of market-based discourses that work to reinforce the hegemony of neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008). Within this however, I draw on the geographical

approach listed above, showing how neoliberalism entails an ongoing process, invading the spaces of everyday life in such a way that it emerges in a range of 'actually existing' contexts (Springer, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002). It is through this process that skateboarding becomes embedded within the wider networks and structures of neoliberalism, extending logics of competitiveness throughout the social realm and thereby marking skateboarding's transformation into a tool of neoliberal governmentality. It is also through an attention to this process, however, that moments of contestation, and the unevenness inherent to skateboarding's neoliberalisation, become clear.

Just as contemporary approaches to investigating neoliberalism cannot be placed under one heading, there was not one simple school of thought involved in the origin of neoliberal ideas. Instead, many scholars have drawn attention to two similar schools of thought that differ in some important ways, namely the Freiburg school in Germany and the Chicago school in the USA. For Davies (2017b: 80), the former was concerned with 'extending legal analysis into economics', promoting fair and equal competition amongst market actors, whilst the Chicago school was concerned with 'extending economic analysis into law', which would lead to a view of competition as a natural producer of inequality. The following sections will detail these differences more fully.

2.1.2: The Freiburg School

The Freiburg school, led by Walter Eucken, was most active during the 1930s, at which time it was associated with 'ordo-liberalism' (Davies, 2017b). In line with general neoliberal thought, ordo-liberalism argued that competition, as it manifests in the free market, was a guarantor of economic and political success, but needed to be encouraged and safeguarded by the state, whose role was to enforce laws and regulations that would institutionalise the market. In this sense, ordo-liberalism recognised some characteristics of socialism as necessary (Madra and Adaman, 2018; Davies, 2017b).

As such, these European scholars did not submit themselves wholly to market forces. Indeed, whilst neoliberalism was predicated upon the minimal state, it was argued amongst them that the state could not submit completely to liberal capitalism, since this would allow the formation of monopolies, and thus act as an inhibiter of fair competition and thereby the optimal distribution of wealth. Hayek was sympathetic to this idea. He argued that the state must submit to and enforce the rules of private property and the free market price system, yet maintain a role in the organisation of fair competition and thus the prevention of unequal concentrations of capital, thereby moving beyond classical liberalism (Hayek, 1944). From this perspective then, the revival of neoliberalism thus entailed some regulation of the market economy. It meant adhering to international rules of competitive markets

and political organisation, yet at the same time preventing an excess of laissez-faire that would encourage a more concentrated form of capitalism in which extremely powerful private actors could reorganise the market for purpose of sole profit, to the detriment of the rest of society (Brennetot, 2015).

2.1.3: The Chicago School: The Convergence of Law and Economics

Whilst the Freiburg and Chicago schools are linked in that they have a common enemy in the form of state-controlled economy, planning and interventionism, in the USA, market enthusiasm took the form of 'permanent criticism of governmental policy' (Foucault, 2008: 248), as articulated by Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Gary Becker, and others at the Chicago University economics department. Originally, the Chicago school was inspired to a large extent by Hayek, and in the 1950s, he began working and teaching there. Yet from the 1960s, as Friedman came to have greater influence over the school, their conception of the best path towards prosperity strayed from ordoliberal ideas in some significant ways (Davies, 2017b).

Whilst Hayek saw monopoly corporations as detrimental to the distribution of capital, Friedman argued that the government imposed a damaging monopoly on the economy, and that private corporations should be left to their own devices, as well as arguing for the abolition of corporate tax (Dean, 2012). The growing popularity of such thinking in Chicago meant a shift in understandings of competition that privileged inequality of outcome over equality throughout the process (Davies, 2017b). Indeed Hayek (1944) imagined fair competition as an essential property of markets, in which all actors are equal at the start and thereby have equal ability to compete, yet under the Chicago way of thinking, it was competitiveness edge that was being praised. Davies (2010: 65) traces the emergence of this shift to the theories of Ronald Coase and the changing nature of anti-trust policy whereby the 'Chicago definition of efficiency was recognized as the only coherent objective'. From here, there was an entire rethinking of legal and ethical method through economic epistemology, ending in unchallenged authority for neoliberal logic.

Ronald Coase's influence was due to his theory of 'transaction cost economics'. The argument here is that all economic activity has associated costs, such as coordination, communication, and even the enforcement of regulation and property rights in a competitive economy (Davies, 2017b). Coase's (1988) argument depends heavily on price theory, the assumption that market actors will act through calculation of the net cost or benefit to themselves and thus rationally maximising their potential whilst minimising their costs. Taking this very literally, Coase realised that, despite the rhetoric of the

competitive market, monopolies still exist, meaning that it is in some cases, it must be more efficient to allow corporations to grow as they please. In theory, this is because those in charge will have made the most rational and beneficial decisions in order to get to such a position, meaning its cost-to-benefit ratio is the lowest possible. From a Coasian perspective then, a functioning monopoly corporation may be more efficient than a costly intervention and this can only be known through an economic empirical examination of each case. This shift was important since it no longer looked at the market as a whole, but at the finer resolution of individual firms, whose success needed to be, and now was, quantifiable (Davies, 2010). It created the conditions for monopolies to form, justifying their presence as an indicator of efficiency. The ramifications of this are the most significant achievement of the Chicago school, it meant that there was no longer a need to advocate a priori efficiency or competition as Hayek and the ordoliberals would have, but that instead there is a calculable method for evaluating individual actions on a case-by-case empirical basis that becomes the true signifier of efficiency (Davies, 2017b).

2.1.4: Neoliberalism as a form of Governmentality: Reconfiguring the State

At this point, the Chicago school and Coasian economics thus set the stage for what is now understood as an underlying principle of neoliberalism, namely the imposition of market rule on all aspects of social life (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Indeed, for Posner (2000), a leading figure in Chicago Law and Economics, price theory was not simply an economic toolkit but could be applied to human social behaviour, rendering all activity economic in some regard whether explicitly involved with the economy or not. Indeed, Coase had the same approach to price theory, regarding it as a method to calculate the efficiency of almost everything 'including real people, with real problems' (Davies, 2017b: 52). On one level then, neoliberalism is about state law and policy being orientated in a way that favours competitive market conditions, but importantly, it is also about generating consenting society of individuals that accept neoliberal logic as a taken-for-granted norm (Clay, 2019). Realising the increasingly rapid economisation of life in this way, Foucault influentially referred to neoliberalism as a form of governmentality.

Foucault's ideas were presented in a series of lectures at the College de France in 1978-1979, just months before the USA and UK elections, entitled 'The Birth of Biopolitics', yet they were not translated into English until 2008. Here, Foucault works neoliberalism into the concept of biopolitical governmentality. Governmentality is concerned with the study of technologies of power, thus highlighting the methods that governments and other actors deploy in order to mould citizens into productive members of society (Cahill et al., 2018). This emphasis here is thus on the construction of

individual qualities and subjectivities. An attention to this exposes the political rationality of said power, since the technologies deployed are in line with the governors' terms and structures. As such, this approach is about describing the organisation and operation of systems of governing and social control, emphasising the political relations that appear because of it (Rose, 1999). The biopolitical here refers to the construction and administration of human life and populations through such governmentality (Foucault, 2003).

For Foucault, neoliberalism is different to liberalism in that is not as dedicated to the curtailing of government control over markets, but represents a much larger project for the exercise of political power through the lens of the economic system. From this perspective, the state no longer acts as a safeguard of social rights, but rather acts to economise the social field in line with 'efficiency', thus entailing a different relationship between governance and population that is articulated through a biopolitical mode of governmentality. Foucault insists then, that neoliberalism brings a new type of state, government and set of demands that are in turn inserted at a different site, working to maintain individual and market freedom, rather than to directly exercise sovereignty (Foucault, 2008).

The role of the state then, is to ensure that no one is excluded from the reach of this, meaning that the state becomes orientated by market requirements (Brown, 2018). This is where neoliberal policies and practices come in, whereby the doctrine of market efficiency creates 'the natural truth of economic and government processes' (Cotoi, 2011: 113), ending in the appearance of a formal and regulated form of concurrence in which social policies of economic growth, private property and individual insurance are the those which the population will abide by (*Ibid.*). As such, neoliberalism is concerned with designating more and more activity as private, both economic and human, since by being responsible for one's own decisions a true path to economic and individual liberty, free of coercion and inefficiency, can be formed. The zone and objects of the private sphere are thus expanded at the expense of public power and a belief in the social.

As neoliberal rationality becomes ubiquitous common sense then, its principles not only govern the state, but schools, universities, hospitals, policing and all manner of human desires and decisions (Spence, 2015). This creates a situation in which the 'neoliberal ethos [is] operative within almost every aspect of our individual and social lives with consequences that are dire for many and dangerous for most if not all of us' (Hamann, 2009: 38). Indeed, it is through neoliberalism's pervasiveness in the spaces of everyday life that its discourses are produced and reproduced. Peck and Tickell (2002) thus argue for a process-based analysis of 'neoliberalisation', since this allows

researchers to understand how social and cultural practices and systems are transformed along the lines of competitive logic, ending in a contextually specific and 'actually existing' contexts, influenced by all manner of geographical landscapes, historical contexts, institutional legacies and embodied subjectivities. It is from there that neoliberalism works to remake the social world through the logic of individualised competition. Next, then, I will show how neoliberalism functions as a mode of governmentality through the creation and dissemination of discourse.

2.1.5: Governmentality, Discourse, and Reconfiguring the Individual

   As mentioned, governmentality is concerned with the study of technologies of power, highlighting the methods that governments and other actors may deploy to mould their citizens into productive members of society (Cahill et al., 2018). Foucault (2008) argues however that if power were only repressive, then it would unlikely be obeyed. Rather, it must work through formations of knowledge and discourses that in turn run through the social realm, creating systems of truth, defining the limits of possibility and thereby materialising the operations of power (Clay, 2019). In this sense, power is located within the individual and is reproduced through their learning processes, attitudes, actions and everyday life (Cole et al., 2004). Governmentality thus serves to constitute certain rules, systems and procedures that comprise 'the order of discourse', a conceptual space in which knowledge is formed and produced and the limits of possibility are thereby constructed (Hook, 2001; Lazzarato, 2009).

   As Liao and Markula (2009) note, a Foucauldian understanding argues that discourses are specific ways of knowing, meaning they are more than just ideologies disguised by particular usage of language as a Gramscian approach would argue. This latter approach entails a theory of hegemony in which ideologies are understood as a system of beliefs that the powerful use to maintain dominance over the subordinate groups (*Ibid*.). A Foucauldian approach does not divide individuals into those who possess power and those who are victims of the powerful, however. Nevertheless, it is still the case that when used in conjunction with governmental power, discourse is understood to influence people's experiences and social practices in unequal ways. This can be explained through the relevance of both non-discursive and discursive practices. The former is a way of intervening in what one does, constructing their possible, or probable actions. Lazzarato (2009) gives the example of an unemployed individual signed up to government benefits. There are decisions made here on resource allocations, namely the timespan and type of their benefits, there is control from agencies over their search for work, organisers of the interview process and training, and pressure to fit the job market. They are governed as living, able beings. A discursive dispositive, on the other hand, refers to one that

is a mode of intervention in what one says, i.e., their possible or probable statements and modes of thinking. This does not literally refer to the ability to speak, but to the establishment of norms and appropriate subjectivities. Categories are constructed through legislative practices such as parliamentary laws, employment agencies, regulations, academic classifications and the like, categories such as unemployment, work, employment etc. Importantly, it is at the sites of actually existing neoliberalism that these discourses are constructed and circulated through the reorganisation of everyday life.

This is therefore how everyday societal discourse is created, including the production of the problems of society, preventing statements from appearing that do not conform to the dominant regime. Together these two types of dispositive define and regulate the limits of possible actions of individuals (Lazzarato, 2009). Importantly, such discourses are not based solely around text or spoken word, but can also include visual images, body language and various semiotic forms coming from a range of sources and actors, all of which can contribute to the formation of knowledge around a certain field (Liao and Markula, 2009). From there, discourse is subsequently reproduced throughout the social system, reinforced through any interaction that draws on such knowledge. In this sense then, discourses are not just a collection of signs, but 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak', working to form and solidify specific knowledges, understandings and practices within everyday life (Foucault, 1972: 49).

In this sense then, individuals in society are always involved in the use of power through their interactions with other people (Liao and Markula, 2009). Governance is thus no longer limited to the state, but increasingly takes place in individuals' lives (Brown, 2018). It is important however to remember that neoliberal society is one of hard inequalities of both money and power (Davies, 2017a). It is the case then, as Foucault (1972) expands, imbalances in power relations form through the tactical use of discourse that influences social practice and experience. This approach does not, therefore, assume a certain mode of discourse and knowledge is inherently good or bad, but rather, it looks at how it is used to form certain power relations and the consequences of such use (Liao and Markula, 2009).

In terms of neoliberalism, Hamann (2009: 38) draws on Foucault to argue that the central aim of neoliberal governmentality is the strategic production of social conditions conducive to the constitution of 'Homo economicus'. Homo economics refers to a specific form of subjectivity centred around autonomy and self-interest whereby the social realm is managed through cost-benefit

calculations that are grounded in market-based principles (Brown, 2015). For Spence (2015), this form of entrepreneurial activity has meant that competition has extended to the individuals themselves, with people having individual objectives and performance evaluations that are in turn emblematic of that individual's success, thereby creating pressure towards self-control. By propagating competition as a natural moral of the market then, competitiveness becomes a moral basis on which to evaluate institutions and individuals in society (Spence, 2015).

Under neoliberalism we are thus encouraged to see ourselves as autonomous units maximising utility and efficiency. In such a system, collective units, such as families, unions or classes are reduced to individualised units consisting of one person rather than many (Boykoff, 2011). A need arises then, to look after one's own interest at the expense of a collective good, meaning individual activity must be as productive as possible (Budd, 2001). One's achievement thus becomes a priority over community well-being since community would leach power from an individual's potential and achievement. The concepts of community and collectivity are subsequently characterised as inefficient and unproductive (Mould, (2021). If one is not to fail, one must set goals, recognise obstacles, accept defeats, and attempt new starts, needing initiative, tenacity, flexibility, and tolerance of frustration (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Orientating all human activity through this lens means that individuals are constantly striving to be as productive as possible, ultimately benefitting the market and economy.

Foucault's point then, was that people act on themselves in such a way due to techniques of coercion deployed in the form of economic incentives, packaged up in what he calls 'the conduct of conduct', or the acting on the actions of others, rather than simply being forced by the governing parties to do what said governor wants. Governance thus organises the public by having individuals organise themselves through the inscription of discourses that become reinforced in everyday life. They are agents in their own construction since they actively follow certain rules and compose themselves in certain ways, constructing themselves as coherent subjects that fit liberal ideals of individual freedom and security (Clay, 2019). This is not to say that populations make decisions that are detrimental to their socio-political status on purpose, but that the neoliberal citizen strategizes themselves in line with various social, political and economic options (Brown, 2005). Such a perspective thus relocates neoliberalism in everyday life and experience and allows some more nuance in understanding why people act in line with neoliberalism (Larner, 2003). It shows also how citizens are incorporated into a market society without ever having to explicitly wish to take part, thus

allowing the government to influence individuals, their actions, comportments, properties, and discourses (Foucault, 2008).

2.1.6: Rounding Neoliberalism Up

As Spence (2015) writes, under neoliberalism, the state becomes depoliticised and de-regulated as is increasingly becomes made up of a concentration of individuals guided by marketised social relations. State government decisions are made in line with market logic, whilst the market becomes increasingly responsible for the governance of a supposedly de-regulated society. Within this, individuals are placed in competition with one another, with success measured in terms of how well it serves the market under the name of a novel sense of freedom (Brown, 2018).

A Foucauldian approach, as outlined above, allows the nuances of state action, private expansion, and power to be highlighted, rather than characterising the state as a compliant agent to the ruling class. It also shows how the individual subject is reconstructed in line with free market ideology (Lazzarato, 2009). From this understanding, many now understand neoliberalism as a historical materialisation and diffusion of governmental rationalities that govern individual citizens and populations through an economic matrix rather than direct coercion of human action (Dean, 2010). It is important, however, to maintain a critical scope of the hierarchy that characterises it, paying attention to the actors involved and the motivations behind such governmental rationalities. It is useful then, to draw distinctions between what Ong (2007) calls 'big N' and 'small n' neoliberalism, whereby the latter refers to the contingent everyday materialisations of neoliberalism whilst the former refers to the macroenvironmental principles that guide and connect them.

Since the governance of everyday life is increasingly handed over to the private sphere (Brown, 2015), discourse comes from not just governments, but from a variety of actors and in a variety of forms all working to create dominant understandings and practices throughout social life (Liao and Markula, 2009). Through an attention to the spaces of actually existing neoliberalism, we see exactly how this happens, highlighting the transformations of everyday life that make competition a more salient part of social reality. Examinations of governmentality and discourse in sport exemplify this pervasiveness, and indeed, as Cole et al. (2004: 207) write, 'scholars of sport cannot avoid Foucault's formulations'. On one hand, state governments themselves have had a crucial role in shaping sport as a mode of governmentality, allocating resources to sport as diplomatic symbols and domestic training mechanisms, public health, and fitness (Milller, 2009). On the other hand, brands such as Nike or commercial events such as the Olympic Games consistently tout the benefits of rational thinking, hard

work and competitive edge that come to be accepted as taken-for-granted norms within sport (Sheppard, 2019; Coakley, 2011a). Such discourses contribute to the construction of sport as a specific field of knowledge, reinforcing the pervasiveness of neoliberalism throughout society. The following sections detail the ways that sport has been shaped by capitalism and subsequently neoliberalised over time. They show how, in an actually existing context, sport now functions as a mode of neoliberal governmentality, creating and disseminating neoliberally informed discourses within sport and society more generally. This will be explained more fully in the coming sections.

2.2: Sports, Capitalism, and Neoliberalism

As neoliberalism has altered almost every level of human existence, sport, as many have shown, has not been immune to this (Coakley, 2011a; Gruneau and Neubauer, 2012). Indeed, neoliberalism has had profound effects on the form and structures of sport that exist today, transforming it into a hyper-corporatised, media-dominated and spectacularised form of entertainment that has come to form an intrinsic part of the everyday lives of billions (Carrington and McDonald, 2009; Cashmore, 2003). Over the last 150 or so years, sports have grown from simple sources of leisure to ritualised, rationalised, hugely institutionalised, and commercialised spectacles that gather audiences of incredible numbers around the world (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). The 1870s-1920s are often referred to as the initial phase in the development of modern sport, since it is this period that sport began to become more organised, international competitions and tournaments began to occur with increasing frequency and spectatorship started to rapidly grow (Smart, 2007). The first international rugby and football matches between Scotland and England, for example, were held in Edinburgh (1871) and Glasgow (1872) respectively, and the first modern Olympic Games was held in Athens (1896). To meet the growing need for organisation that this was creating, numerous sporting governing bodies were established (Maguire, 1999). The International Football Association Board and International Rugby Association Board were both established in 1886, for example, and the International Amateur Athletic Association was established in 1912 (Smart, 2007).

The development of such a sporting form is inextricably tied to the development of capitalism over time (Andrews, 2004). During the 19th century, as capitalist industries developed and matured in Western Europe and North America, sports emerged as a fitting release of energy in response to a life dominated by industrial labour (Cashmore, 2003). As industry progressed, so too did the need to create and maintain a disciplined working class (Veal, 2004). As such, sport began to be used as a means of producing and instilling discipline into a growing industrial workforce. In the United

Kingdom, many employers encouraged factory sports teams, for example, to create a sense of company identification amongst its workers. Both Arsenal (figure 1) and West Ham have their origins in factories for this reason (Budd, 2004). As such, sport came to increasingly mirror the spaces of industrial labour, with strict rules, more organised structures and designated times and spaces, ultimately limiting the expressions of those who played and later those who supported (Sewart, 1987). This period thus saw the emergence of institutionalised sport, at least partially, as an agent of social control for the urban industrial population (Andrews, 2004).
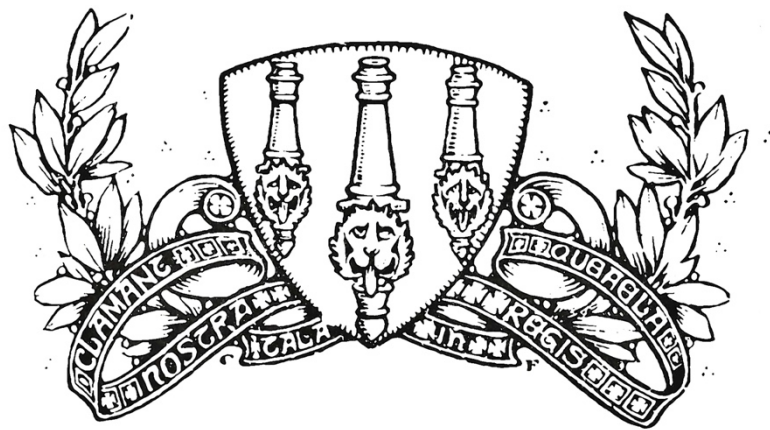
Figure 1: Original Arsenal Football Club Logo used 1888-1922. The logo is based on the Woolwich coat of arms, where the Royal Arsenal and Royal Artillery were located.

As sport became increasingly popular and institutionalised, the profits it yielded became larger. Following the second world war, and especially so over the last 40 years as the leisure and entertainment industries expanded (Gruneau, 1999), this process increased in pace, and sport became to succumb more and more to the lure of commercial capitalism (Andrews, 2004). The commodification and commercialisation of sport thus progressed at an outstanding rate, with the entry of market-centred processes and rationalities into the realm of sport. A product of this is the overt spectacularisation of sport and the expansive and intricate circuit of matches, games and events that has consequently been developed. From local club games to national and international tournaments, these events work to market sport to the widest audience possible in new and exciting ways in search of revenue. Indeed, these events form the skeleton of the global sports industry and are a major source of its wealth, impact, and reach.

Since competition was becoming increasingly important, there was then a need to further refine sports in terms of their rules, formats and organisation, as to ensure the smooth-running of competition and thereby the generation of winners and losers as to create an exciting and marketable event (Sewart, 1987). This is crucial so that participants and audiences know what is required, permitted, prohibited and how to win or lose, ultimately turning the sports into a form of entertainment for mass audiences (Vamplew, 2018). As profit has become increasingly important then, the activities themselves have been transformed to meet this need, leading to changes in the internal logic of the game (Sewart, 1987). Cricket has changed for this reason, resulting in the development of the one-day game, to the detriment some would say of the longer, more traditional Test matches. In Australia specifically, floodlit night matches began to be used as a means to generate greater broadcasting revenue, expanding the times possible to play and record the game (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). To reap the economic rewards that this huge industry brings, we have seen the professionalisation and global migration of players, the corporatisation of clubs, the proliferation of merchandising and a general redefinition of the competitive structures and ethos' of sport (Walsh and Giulianotti, 2001). Here, winning, and ultimately profit, were quickly becoming the main goals for sport teams and organisers, characterising sports as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself (Budd, 2004).

In this sense, sport became increasingly characterised by scientific and economic rationalities (Sewart, 1987). For Maguire (1999), this process represents the emergence of a sporting monoculture that champions constant improvement and achievement, directed by a strict quest for excellence, whilst stories of successful and determined athletes litter the headlines (Knight et al., 2005). Indeed, as Warner and Dixon (2015) write, the nature of sport in Western societies is based primarily on a competitive win-at-all-cost model. At the same time, tournaments and competitions, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup have come to increasingly reflect commodified and rationalised forms, cast as a form of spectacular entertainment for audiences that regularly amount to the billions with annual revenues to match (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). Today then, modern sport now exists as a prime commodity in the international entertainment economy; a hyper-corporatised, media-dominated aspect of everyday life (Carrington and McDonald, 2009; Cashmore, 2003). Through this transformation, sport has become a site of actually existing neoliberalism, and it is from there that it increases the pervasiveness of the norms of individualism and competition in everyday life, to which I now turn.

2.2.1: Sports as Neoliberal Governmentality

For many then, this manifestation of sport mirrors the workings of neoliberal society since it represents achieving success through hard work, strict following of rules, competition and gratification (Beal, 1998; Coakley, 2011a; Nauright, 2014). It champions those with the best talent and discipline, therefore climbing the ladder of success and achieving great wealth and fame, not dissimilar to the ideological underpinnings of society under neoliberal capitalism (Davies, 2014). More than just a reflection though, it is argued that sport actively reinforces these ideals in society (Coakley, 2011a). Miller (2009) therefore argues that sports can be characterised as an example of governmentality, normalising certain discourses in wider society such as touting the reward of hard work and sacrifice, the primacy and naturalness of competition, the importance of self-discipline, rule-following, and more. This is not to say that sports simply deposit various ideas about society that an audience then passively and unproblematically absorbs, but that from a Foucauldian perspective, sport comprises a field in which its practices are defined through discourse, giving rise to a set of dominant practices and understandings whereby meaningful participation requires serious dedication and competitive edge (Liao and Markula, 2009). See figure 2, for example.

OLYMPIC HISTORY IN THE MAKING?

Which superstars are most likely to etch their names into history and become Olympic record holders?

With just one day until the Beijing 2022 Opening Ceremony, it is the perfect time to have a look at the record books.

Figure 2: A screenshot of an Olympics marketing email, showing how the Games celebrates the most successful athletes and elevates them to the level of celebrity.

Sport as a mode of governmentality manifests in a few different ways. Governments allocate resources to sporting organisations as a domestic training mechanism, for example, promoting messages of public health and fitness (Carrington and McDonald, 2009). As well as this, youth training programmes are often deployed as a socialising force, working to correct societal ills (Coakley, 2011b), or to train individuals for neoliberal society (Beal et al., 2017), whilst in general there seems

to be an understanding amongst policymakers that when undertaken correctly, organised sport pushes development in a positive direction, both physically and socially (Österlind and Fahlén, 2015). Yet, with the idea of governmentality in mind, the formal structures, aims and objectives of organised sport can be critically reviewed.

Indeed, as Beal (1998) writes, through the structuring of popular culture activities such as sport in line with capitalist corporate bureaucratic social relations, those social values are promoted and legitimised to the point in which they become taken-for-granted assumptions. As such, modern competitive sport has become a key method in generating public consent towards neoliberal policy. As Lowe (2016) argues then, sport has now become a multi-billion-dollar industry that produces a kind of cultural hegemony, conveying norms and values about the ethics of identification, competition and consumption via the marketing and circulation of brands, icons and celebrities that tout the power and promise of success in sports for those willing to shed blood, sweat and tears in pursuit of being number one Modern sport, therefore, produces bodily discourses of exertion, force, rules and competition in which failure is meant to signal a lack of superior performance (Sheppard, 2019). These are inherently neoliberal discourses, based on entrepreneurial activity, cost-benefit calculations, and performance evaluation, creating narratives of individualisation and self-control over co-operation and community (Hamman, 2009). This argument forms the basis of this thesis, with skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games being used to show how sports are organised and presented in ways that are firstly done so in line with market logic but second in ways that actively reinforce the dominant system of market logic that so shapes social life.

2.2.2: Sport Media

Sport media is instrumental to this process. Over the last 50 years, in line with the expansion of the leisure and entertainment industries, and the role of sports within these, developments in media technologies, media sport has come to be a salient part of the everyday life of billions across the globe (Silk, 2004). During this period, the development and dissemination of media technology served to bring sport to an even wider audience. Indeed, the production and distribution of reports, information, and commentary of sport in the media have been central to this to the point where they are normalised as natural aspects of sport (Coakley, 2011a).

The mediatisation of sport has been and continues to be greatly important in transforming the nature of physical activity in the modern world (Silk, 2004), allowing it to further realise its governmental tendencies. Furthering this, Whannel (2009) notes that technological innovation has

also allowed sports broadcasting to undergo a continual renewal of its appeal, and now the televisual experience is in many ways superior to the experience obtained by viewing it in person due to the ability to manipulate the time and space of play through media technologies (Barnfield, 2013). Indeed, out of the various ways in which television has impacted social and cultural patterns, its impact on sport has been particularly dramatic, transforming it 'into a set of commodified global spectacles, producing huge audiences and massive new sources of income' (Whannel, 2009: 206). In doing so, it undermines the embedded localism of sport, facilitating the emergence of global fan bases for the market leaders (New York Yankees or Manchester United for example) and turning the most successful and marketable sport participants into celebrities.

Along with these aesthetic transformations however, so came an economic shift whereby televised sport became increasingly attractive to sponsors and advertisers, with the huge audiences it gathers bringing new pools of revenue for both public and private bodies alike meaning that sport governing bodies needed to transform themselves, offering a form of sport that accommodated the increasing primacy of television and the processes of commercialisation and commodification that come alongside it (Whannel, 2009). As a result of the increasing mediatisation of sport has thus been the conflation of broadcasting sport and corporate interests into what has long been known as the 'sports-media complex', characterised also by the significant concentration of ownership and control in sport media (Jhally, 1984).

The global sports-media complex is made up of three key groups, the sports organisations, media/marketing organisations and multinational corporations. Generally speaking, many sport organisations have little or no control over the nature and form in which their sport is televised and covered, instead being more dependent on media organisations whose main goal is to attract audiences and advertisers (Maguire, 2011). Therefore, sport has become more compliant with media demands (Boyle and Haynes, 2009), resulting in a process of spectacularisation involving sport's transformation into a commodity whose value is determined by the size and composition of the audience it can deliver to potential advertisers and media broadcasters. Indeed, as Maguire (2011: 969) writes, 'the hegemonial position enjoyed by specific sports within this global sport-media complex requires less-powerful sports to conform to the style and form in which the dominant sports are displayed', with the glitz and the spectacle of the NFL or NBA becoming the benchmark by which other sports are judged. For this reason then, the rules and format of televised sport are often altered for entertainment needs, such as the shortening of baseball pitches to increase the number of home runs or scheduling certain events during prime television hours, such as the LA 1984 Olympics

marathon taking place in the evening despite athlete's concerns of pollution levels during rush hour traffic (Sewart, 1987). Likewise, the International Badminton Federation introduced a series of rule changes in 2002 to make the game seem faster and more exciting (Percy, 2015).

As Morissette (2014) shows, the ubiquity of televised sports and their general taken-for-granted status marks sport broadcasts as an important object for analysis. In line with these developments then, from the 1980s onwards, but especially so from the 1990s, scholars began to interrogate the growing relationship between media and sports. This continues today with inquiries into the commodification of sport (Vamplew, 2018), media treatments of gender (McClearen, 2018) and race (Van Sterkenberg et al., 2010), nationalism (Woo Lee, 2021), fandom (Finn, 2021) and audience experiences (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2019). Early investigations such as Whannel (1984: 102) note how 'television does not simply cover events, but transforms them into stories', meaning that there are certain technical decisions made when covering sport that turn it into a narrativised event. As a consequence, scholars such as Rader (1984) have argued that this has a corrupting and exploitative influence on sport, distorting its values, and turning it into a form of entertainment for mass audiences. On the other hand, Whannel (2009: 214) sees televised sport in a positive light whereby 'major live sport may just be the last bastion of the experience of simultaneous communal viewing' in a market-orientated society that inherently atomises communities into individuals.

Vamplew (2018) refers to the emergence of such a spectacularised form of sport as a 'spectator product', whereby sports are rendered marketable to audiences either at the venue or increasingly on television and other electronic devices. Technical decisions made in the representation of sport on television then are inherently economic ones, based on rendering the event a marketable product. As he continues, this is not just about the domination of media in ownership of sports clubs and events, but about shaping and defining what sport is. Indeed, as Gruneau et al. (2013) argued, televised sport involves highly mediated representations which actively promote certain readings and meanings of sport, meaning it has an ideological effect that ultimately aids in sustaining contemporary modes of domination. It is thus here, in the reproduction of norms and values, that we find the political implications embedded within televised sport and its capacity to render sport a tool of neoliberal governmentality. For Whannell (2009) then, the impact of television on sport has two branches, firstly the impact it has upon the institutions, rituals, and practices of organised sport, reshaped by their need to be marketable, and secondly the impact it has upon spectators, the television audience, and social practices through the definition of sports as a field of knowledge and practice.

2.2.3: Governmentality and Discourse in Televised Sport

As Maguire (2011) outlines, research on media sport has examined the structuring of media sport texts and their role in sustaining systems of domination, whereby media sport is treated as a cultural form and product through which mechanisms for regulating public discourse are enacted. This is a classic argument in the examination of media sport. Cantelon and Gruneau (1988), for example, have highlighted the way television constructs sporting events is reflective of the meritocratic and individualistic values of capitalism. They are filmed and framed so that the images and stories on screen are intensified in ways that the audience can relate to and identify with, whilst simultaneously naturalising dominant definitions of sport. As such, for Gruneau (1999), the stories, dramas and symbolic representations that sporting practices produce should be interpreted as a manifestation of the resources and influences of those who control athletic institutions, structuring sports in certain ways to contour the values, meanings, and significations therein along economic lines. Such an attribution draws on the political concerns of the Frankfurt School, who feared these developments for their potential for cultural degradation and the emergence of new technologies of ideological domination (Blain, 2002).

Fitting with the themes of neoliberalism and governmentality, my argument here is that many of the techniques used to commodify sport for broadcasting purposes in this way render neoliberal notions of individual liberalism and competition a more important part of sporting events (Morissettte, 2014). To achieve this, Morissette (2014) argues that sporting events are filmed and framed such that the images, stories and studio material serve to manufacture heroic images and dramas that the audience is invited to identify with, normalising mainstream definitions of sport in which to succeed is to dominate your opponent through sufficient training and individual merit. Importantly, he notes that the narratives created in televised sports are often covered from the perspective of the individual, who is in competition with others. Here, the alleged power of the individual stems from the rationalised and formalised egalitarian structure of unrestricted competition. At the beginning of the competition, chances of winning are, in theory, equally distributed, with the rules and conditions of the game being equal for both sides. The winner can therefore be seen as intrinsically superior to their opponent, meaning their strength, vigour, determination and will to win allows distinguishment from the rest of the competition by beating them (Morissette, 2014).

In producing such a sporting event then, certain visual and verbal codes are at work which can be understood through four main elements as outlined by Whannel (1992):

- Hierarchisation: The signalling that some things are more important than others.
- Personalisation: The presentation of events from an individualised perspective.
- Narrative: The telling of events in the form of stories.
- Context: The placing of events in wider frames of reference.

These work to contextualise the on-screen events and promote certain readings of the sport. They take various forms familiar to viewers of televised sport such as commentary, cutting and editing of the live match, the use of camera positions and angles, slow motion, graphics, music, interviews, and expert analysis, all allowing the sport to seemingly increase in pace and intensity.

Through such techniques, televised sport is represented through the conventions of narrative drama in the sense that competitions are chronicled into a beginning, middle and end (Barnfield, 2013). To this end, commentators, if present, must make sense of and talk through the action as it happens whilst also linking what is happening with wider events, situating them within a related context. The content of the event thus draws viewers in through its narrative drama-style construction, with a step-by-step story that progresses to a final result. Narrative in this case is a thus combination of verbal and visual cues coming together in a broadcast, informing an unconscious understanding of what is happening on screen and of the norms and values of sport more generally (Barnfield, 2013).

When framed in this way, sport has more to do with theatricality and the dramatization of a society of individuals than with anything else (Elias, 1991). It becomes a stage in which rights are equally distributed allowing for the playing out of individual quests for self-expression and accomplishment for which each holds responsibility for their own fate. The best candidates are then singled out through competition (Morissette, 2014). For Gebauer (2006: 241-242) then, 'the principle of modern mythic narrative in [sport] takes up the overall increase of power within society through technical and economic progress, and reinterprets it as the power of the individual'. It is therefore important to pay attention to how sporting events are captured and made intelligible, and how the embedded stories are organised, developed, and told (Barnfield, 2013).

It is now the case that many audiences take competition as a taken for granted in sport, to the point where sport and competition have become almost synonymous, and competition is seen as a key way of motivating and improving the sport experience for all (Warner and Dixon, 2015). As argued above however, competition is a learned phenomenon (Brown, 2015) and whilst sport is just one site at which this is reinforced, it is one of the most common and pervasive (Warner and DIxon, 2015). Through the framing of sports events for media consumption then, market-based discourses are worked through society, ultimately working to maintain the prevalence of neoliberalism is our everyday lives. In this sense, sport as a spectator product is involved in the forming and disseminating or certain sporting subjectivities and can be thought of as a key mode in which sport works as a form of governmentality (Miller, 2009). As a result, there is now a situation in which a 'commercially focused, demand-led, 24/7 media system has helped to facilitate the seemingly insatiable appetite for particular sporting discourses' (Boyle and Haynes, 2009: vii). This process has been intrinsic to the development of the Olympic Games as we know them today, and the next sections explain this more fully.

2.2.4: The Olympic Games

Over the past 125 years since IOC founder Baron Pierre de Coubertin's initial revival of the international Olympic Games held in Athens in April 1896, the Games have followed the general trend in the development of modern sports (Smart, 2018), becoming increasingly regulated with a tight institutional, commercialised framework and strict by-laws whilst touting the primacy of competition and success to its global audience. Originally, for Coubertin at least, his revival of the Games would bring about major social change and transform European society, returning it to the traditional values that capitalism has erased in favour of materialist ones which he saw as a misdirection of human energy leading to moral decline. He believed that sport, when properly structured, could serve as a vehicle for realising the human body's potential and emotions and thereby reverse the conditions of alienation and economic domination that came with the expansion of industrial capitalism during the last half of the 19th century. As part of this, he was committed to the amateur principle and participation as a way of celebrating bodily movement, rather than competition (Beamish, 2009).

There were many faults in Coubertin's revival project, firstly that he remarked on multiple occasions that women had no place in his vision of sport, and second that his project failed, with the IOC becoming almost bankrupt as problems of cost and logistics came to front. Now, however, the Games are a commodity that is to be purchased by the highest bidding broadcaster for millions. It is used by city governments to widen the reach of policing and surveillance measures, and by national

governments to push nationalist agendas, all whilst the performance of an individual athlete at the Olympics has become the ultimate moment in their career (Boykoff, 2020).

The Olympic network has thus evolved from a small group of aristocratic volunteers to a global network of sport and non-sport organisations that together contribute to the staging of the Summer, Winter and Youth Olympic Games in four-year cycles. Today, it has become such a high-profile global phenomenon that it has attracted the world's most prominent cities to compete to host the Games in order to give their city a brief moment on the global stage created by such a media platform and the supposed economic benefits this will bring (Boykoff, 2014). As Kidd (2013) writes, television gave a huge boost especially to the Olympic Games, and in many ways has led to a complete restructuring of OM. The OM's long association with the mass media, and the media's (and other companies') seemingly endless fascination with the Games has helped to bring in huge audiences across the globe. Tokyo 2020 gained an approximate 3.05 billion viewers, for example, and Rio 2016 had 3.2 billion (Statista, 2022).

It also gathers tremendous revenues. During the 2017-2021 cycle for example, spanning the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Games and Tokyo 2020 Summer Games, the IOC reported an income of USD 7.6 billion (IOC, 2021a). This is despite cities almost always, aside from a few cases, recording a net loss after hosting the Games (Boykoff, 2020). Whilst in recent years the IOC has seen yet another decline in bids from host cities due to reignited scepticism around the economic viability of hosting the Games (only Paris and LA applied for the 2024 Summer Games), the historically low levels of support that the IOC experiences in the run-up to Tokyo 2020 as a result of their handling of the event amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Zirin and Boykoff, 2021) and a globally growing 'NOlympics' movement (Boykoff, 2020) (see figure 3), it is no doubt that the Olympics is the most significant actor in the representation and development of sport at the international level (Batuev and Robinson, 2017).

Since the revival of the Olympic Games in the 19th Century, the values of Olympism have thus been transformed in line with the rampant commercialisation of sport that has reduced the Games to a marketplace commodity based on professionalism, commercialism and spectacular media (Smart, 2018). The form and spirit of the Olympic Games as it exists today then, does not resemble Coubertin's exuberant mission at all. Such a form of the Games took a long time to develop however, with the LA 1984 Summer Games often being cited as a turn towards commercialisation and spectacularisation and ultimately a sporting model that champions neoliberal rhetoric through its presentation of sport.

Figure 3: Protesters marching in the streets towards Tokyo 2020 stadium before the opening ceremony. The front banner reads 'cancel the Olympics'. Source: Sayuri Inoue, Photo ID: 2013149384, https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/tokyo-japan-july-24-2021-protesters-2013149384

2.2.5: The LA 1984 Summer Olympic Games

The transformation of the Olympics in the way occurred steadily over the 20th century, but the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles are widely recognised as a significant turning point for the Games and have become representative of the moment in which the Games moved away from the idea of government-supported organisation in favour of a new neoliberalised direction of private-public partnerships, private sector funding and corporate sponsorships (Gruneau and Neubauer, 2012). These Games occurred in a very specific political context, only three years after Ronald Reagan's election to US President in 1981, and therefore at the beginning of harsh neoliberal economic reform in the USA. The event was funded and organised in full by the private sphere and generated substantial revenue from the international sale of television broadcasting rights and corporate sponsorship equating to a profit of USD 232.5 million. This sponsorship consisted of contracts with 35 major commercial corporates including McDonald's, Coca-Cola, American Express, 64 official suppliers including Adidas and Panasonic, and finally allowing a further 65 companies to place the Olympic five rings logo on their products and advertising (Boykoff, 2014). This is in contrast to the previous 1976

Montreal and 1980 Moscow Games which were both publicly funded, the former of which became infamous for the incredible amounts of debt it created for the city following some ambitious and expensive publicly funded urban development projects (Smart, 2018).

   The 1984 Games were also the first Games that took place under former IOC president Juan Antonia Samaranch (1980-2001), who attached the IOC to the onset of neoliberal capitalism, well underway in the USA by this point. This lead the Games to become increasingly commodified and commercialised as the role of private capital in staging the games began to increase in importance (Boykoff, 2014). Learning from business executive and head of the LA OCOG Peter Ueberroth, as well as from FIFA's intensifying sponsorship-based model. Samaranch realised the potential of such a model of the Olympics, and so the IOC took back control of all sponsorship and media revenues after the 1984 Games and also initiated an international Olympic sponsorship programme to generate private sector funding. Since 1984, no OCOG has since been granted the same monopolistic control over revenue production as LA 1984. The role of public investment thus began to reappear in the Games again as early as Seoul 1988, but the private sphere and neoliberalism more generally remain a firm part of the OM (Smart, 2018). Indeed, the IOC has since recorded mass increases in revenue, and has evolved into an organisation that more than anything has a clear understanding of how best to commercialise the Olympic brand (Gruneau and Neubauer, 2012). Today, the Olympic Games exists as 'the world's greatest media and marketing event—a global celebration of exceptional athletics swaddled in corporate cash' whilst 'huge corporations vie for association with the "Olympic Image" in the hope of gaining a worldwide marketing audience of billions' (Boykoff, 2014: 2).

   This revenue comes from various sources, such as television broadcasting rights, which began with the 1948 London Summer Games, but increased in importance as a revenue source most rapidly from the 1970s onwards as media technologies continued to develop and became the IOC's main income source for the following decades. Most recently, for example, the IOC signed a deal with Comcast that handed Olympic broadcasting rights over to NBC Universal in the US until 2032 for USD 7.65 billion (Owen, 2020). Revenues also received a further boost from 1985 onwards due to its international sponsorship programme The Olympic Partner (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbot, 2008). At present, this programme is expected to raise a record-breaking USD 3 billion in the 2021-2024 cycle and is now set to overtake broadcasting rights as the OM's biggest income source (Owen, 2021). Other sources include percentages levied from OCOGs' sponsorship programmes and ticketing incomes.

As Nauright (2014) writes, the Games are now inextricably tied to an economic system based on corporate interests that demand a return on investment as a result of their sponsorship of the Games and the perceived public exposure. Such reliance on income from the private sector has led to the Olympics becoming more a form of media entertainment, spectacle, and therefore revenue than they are a celebration of the sports and bodily movement themselves. As a result, the sports themselves have become commoditised products, showcasing the world's best athletes on the global stage along with their stories of success, failure, determination, and struggle. It is here in which the neoliberal and governmental tendencies of the Games lie; in the forms of sport that the Olympics organises and represents, as well as the logics and values it champions and the discourses it subsequently produces.

2.2.6: Governing the Games: The IOC, The Olympic Movement, and The Values of Olympism

As the expansion of the Games increased over the 20th century, and especially so since the LA 1984 Summer Games, the Olympics have required increasingly strict and technocratic forms of governance to navigate organisational issues, public relations, sponsorship deals, broadcasting rights, competitive structures for each individual sport, and more. For Ferkins et al. (2009: 245), sport governance refers to the 'responsibility for the functioning and overall direction of the organization' and applies at all institutional levels from club and team to national and international bodies. As Henry and Lee (2004) note, sport governance often takes place across a multi-level network of organisations that exercise direction, management and power, something that is reflected clearly in the Olympic system through the existence of the OM (Pielke et al., 2020).

Whilst the IOC is the leading organisation of the Olympic Games then, an event of such size, with the large number of sporting events and participants that are involved, as well as the years of planning required, means that the IOC does not govern the Games independently. Rather, the Games are orchestrated by the OM, a network of five main types of organisations including the IOC, OCOGs, NOCs, IFs, and NFs. Each of these vary greatly in size and importance depending on the sport, country and time. The IOC (2021c: *np*) describes itself as the 'supreme authority of the Olympic Movement'. Its role is to support and foster collaboration between all involved parties to ensure the smooth running of the Games.

Established in 1894 by Pierre de Coubertin and Demetrois Vikelas, the IOC has become one of the largest NPSOs that exists today. As published most recently in the updated Olympic Charter (IOC, 2021b), which serves to codify the governance principles and functions of all organisations that are part of the OM (Postlethwaite and Grix, 2016), the mission and role of the IOC is said to consist of 18

separate but interrelated goals. This includes tasks such as 'encourage and support the promotion of ethics and good governance in sport', 'to take action and strengthen the unity of the Olympic Movement', and 'to promote a positive legacy from the Olympic Games' (IOC, 2021b: 13-14).

Generally speaking, there is a principle advertised by sport organisations that sport encourages a transcendent moral good (Jedlicka, 2018). Likewise, there is a belief that sports are a fixed and innate expression of human impulse and nature, therefore validating such claims on the ground that they are pure manifestations of humanity (Coakley, 2011a). This holds true for the IOC and the OM, which describes its moral tasks in the values of 'Olympism' (figure 4), stating that their vision is 'building a better world through sport'. It aims to do this by educating the masses 'through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values' (IOC, 2019c, *np.*).

Olympism is a philosophy of life, which places sport at the service of humankind.

VISION	Building a better world through sport			
VALUES	Excellence		Respect	Friendship
MISSIONS	• Ensure the uniqueness and the regular celebration of the Olympic Games • Put athletes at the heart of the Olympic Movement • Promote sport and the Olympic values in society, with a focus on young people			
WORKING PRINCIPLES	Universality and Solidarity	Unity in Diversity	Autonomy and Good Governance	Sustainability

Figure 4: The philosophy of Olympism, as articulated by the IOC. Clearly then, the IOC and the OM have a certain vision that is wants to achieve, deploying the Olympics as a tool for achieving it. Source: IOC 2019b.

Scholars as early as Hoberman (1984), however, have shown that sports are not neutral, but instead a form of expressionism that lends itself to ideological manipulation. In this sense, specific manifestations of sport, including governance frameworks, but also competition frameworks and the overtly commercialised events mega events that they create are imbued by ideological elements of their producers (Jedlicka, 2018). As mentioned throughout this chapter, a form of sport based on commercialism and competition reinforces and normalises these as a taken-for-granted part of everyday life. It thus plays a role in the legitimisation of neoliberalism more generally in the social realm (Coakley, 2011a). As Jedlicka (2018) argues then, if sport matters in ways that extend beyond

the actual competitions, then sport governance must be understood as more than the technical regulation and management of sport, but as something that has repercussions throughout the social realm. Indeed, as Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbot (2008) recognise, social orders are crafted and perpetuated by a variety of means, and the IOC and the OM are no exception to this. They have been instrumental in garnering support for a form of international cooperation clothed in the malign resuscitation of the Olympic spirit (*Ibid*.).

Through close attention to the OM, Olympic Charter and the values of Olympism then, the ways in which the governance of the Olympic Games serves to create a neoliberal system of sport become clear. Due to the incredible number of sports and events that are included in the Games, each requires their own international and national federations that must enforce the standards of the Olympics Charter onto their respective sports. Whilst these sports are governed by bodies independent of the IOC, the Olympic Charter serves to ensure that the IOC has a monopoly over the concepts and values that have defined and sustained dominant interpretations of sport (Nauright, 2014). Since the IOC's ideology has been inextricably coupled with a financial capitalist ideology through tight association with transnational corporations (*Ibid*.), the governance principles of the IFs and NFs must align with the commercial directions of the OM. In this sense, the first role of governing bodies within the OM is to produce an internationally regulated competition framework, essentially giving the IOC a product that it can sell. The role of the OM is thus to ensure that the sports they present to audiences must be marketable, meaning they must first make sense as 'sports' (Rinehart, 2008), be exciting and relatable to audiences (Barnfield, 2013) and ultimately achieve the biggest television audience possible so that broadcasters, sponsors, advertisers and the IOC are all able to generate revenue from them (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). Thinking through a critical analysis of sport and governmentality then, the ways that the Olympics seeks and functions to normalise certain values and norms around sport and society more generally are made explicit here, being literally codified into the OM's working mission.

In this sense, the OM exists as a framework of institutions that promote and reinforce the values of Olympism within sport and society. These are neoliberalised understandings of sport. The Games are, for example, especially framed in neoliberal languages of individual competition and success that sport and general media are seemingly obsessed with. Successful athletes litter the headlines, or where they fail, their failure is typically discussed through neoliberal discourses of not trying hard enough, lack of correct training or desire to win (Knight et al., 2005). The BBC (2019a: *np*), for example, write of how London 2012 Olympics were one of the 'greatest moments of the decade' after

Team GB bought home 6 gold medals on the day of 4th August. Likewise, we can watch 'Britain's greatest Olympic moments', showing clips of British athletes succeeding in their sports in the run up to the delayed 2020 Tokyo Games, asking us to hope that there will be plenty more memories indelibly forged on the Great British consciousness next summer' (BBC, 2020: *np*).

All of this serves to reinforce the idea that sports should be done for competitive reasons. Likewise, the Olympics' news channels and social media accounts constantly post success stories and record-breakers. Academia is not immune to this, Arnold et al. (2015: 386) offer factors for consideration when constructing a winning Olympic team, which they describe as an 'ultimate purpose', based on a study of Team GB during the 2012 Games. Késenne (2006) even proposes the 'win maximization model', which includes various scientific formulae equating to a percentage chance of winning. Over the 20th century then, but especially so in the years since the LA 1984 Games then, and in line with developments in sport and media cultures throughout the last half of the 20th century, the Olympic Games has come to be at the forefront of the contemporary neoliberal sports model. On one level, its existence is dictated by the structures of neoliberal logic, being propped up by private corporations and free market capitalism whilst on the other level coming to showcase a version of sport that is both forged in the fires and reproductive of neoliberalism.

2.3: Alternatives to the Neoliberal Sport Model

As neoliberal ideas and beliefs are increasingly woven into the social order in this way (and many others), it becomes more difficult to collectively resist and gain support for alternative forms of organisation (Harvey, 2007). Indeed, such a form of sport runs the risk of perpetuating the problem by reinforcing neoliberal capitalism and its associated sporting enterprises rather than offering alternatives that include strengthening democracy, using health and fitness to enhance the quality of life and overall contributing to community-based futures (Nauright and Pope, 2017). However, in the face of individualisation, integration is possible if we 'try to forge new, politically open, creative forms of bond and alliance' (Beck and Beck-Gerhsheim 2002: 18). Despite modern elite sport's touting of the benefits and rewards of individualism and competition, it is the case that many sporting practices do give hopeful examples of people coming together as mutuals, showing elements of resilience to the flattening and individualising forces of neoliberalism.

Realising this, over the last 30 years, many scholars have examined a range of sporting activities that challenge traditional ways of seeing, doing, and understanding sport (Wheaton, 2013), presenting an

alternative to the 'western sport model' (Bale, 1994) of 'achievement sport' (Eichberg, 2010),
characterised by rule-bound, competitive, masculinised and strictly institutionalised forms (Wheaton,
2010). These sports have been variously termed 'extreme' (Donnelly, 2006), 'alternative' (Griggs,
2012), 'lifestyle' (Wheaton, 2004), 'whiz' (Midol and Broyer, 1995), 'action' (Thorpe and Wheaton,
2011). Some examples include skateboarding, snowboarding, BASE jumping, kitesurfing, rock climbing
and BMXing. As Bourdieu (1984) writes, many of these sports developed in North America during the
1960s and were then exported to Europe by American entrepreneurs. Despite the differences in
nomenclature however, and whilst each sport has its own history, identities and development
patterns, there are some commonalities in the ethos' and ideologies that surround them (Wheaton,
2010).

   Firstly, at the grassroots, there are often lived cultures that are fundamentally about taking part, or
'doing it', rather than generating winners and losers as more traditional sports would have it.
Conversely then, the emphasis here is on the process of the activity itself rather than an external
outcome, such as the generation of winners or losers (Beal, 1995). Indeed, as Wheaton (2004) argues.
these activities are rarely practised for competitive reward. Moreover, participation in these sports
often takes place in spaces that lack regulation and control, and the sports are performed in ways that
often denounce and resist institutionalisation and commercialisation (Wheaton, 2004). These spaces
include the sea (surfing, kitesurfing), mountains (snowboarding, skiing) and the street (parkour,
skateboarding, BMXing). They are spaces in which participants make frequent referral to embodied
notions of freedom, self-expression, enjoyment and being at one with the environment. Lastly, these
sports often have various cultural attachments and individual and collective identities that are used by
participants to create distinct lifestyles. 'Lifestyle' here refers to the styles of life and social identities
that are often central to the meaning and experience of these activities, as well as their wider socio-
cultural significance (Wheaton, 2004). The term itself is an expression often adopted by the
participants but can also be productively used to reflect the characteristics of these sports, as well as
capture the importance of the socio-historical context in which these activities emerged, took shape
and continue to change. Referral to these sports as a 'lifestyle' has been documented in the cases of
windsurfing (Wheaton, 2004), skateboarding (Borden, 2019a), snowboarding (Thorpe, 2012), climbing
(Lewis, 2004), and more. Within these lifestyles, there are often crossovers with other cultural realms
such as art, music, film, spirituality, and religion, all working to create multiple social identities and
forms (Borden, 2019a; O'Connor, 2020).

Since their emergence, these activities have experienced unprecedented growth in participation, in many cases spreading around the world much faster than most established sports and from increasingly diverse settings (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011). As Thorpe (2011: 1) writes for example, snowboarding 'has gone from a marginal activity for a few diehard participants to an Olympic sport with mass appeal in the past four decades'. Likewise, from the inception of commercial skateboards in the 1950s and 1960s, skateboarding is now a global phenomenon and an Olympic sport, with an estimated fifty million practitioners and thousands of skateparks and found 'skate spots' worldwide, alongside an industry estimated to reach $2.4 billion by 2025 (Statista, 2019).

With this in mind then, Eichberg (2010) argues that as sport has grown to its contemporary form, the term 'sport' itself has become less and less clear, fragmenting into the great show of elite achievements on one side, and popular sport as people's practice on the other. As such it is argued that the contemporary sport landscape is thus characterised in by a dual nature, manifesting as sites of routine mechanised existence and everyday domination on one hand, and sites of joy, creativity, and everyday resistance on the other (Carrington, 2009; Eichberg, 2010). Of course, in their purest form, both are fundamentally still practices of the body in space and time (Rinehart, 2000), but their wider socio-cultural context differs in many ways, shaped by the conditions in which they take place, where, by whom and for what reason (Carrington, 2009). If modern sporting institutions are bastions of projecting neoliberalism as a cultural ideology and economic movement, then alternative sports, through their transgressive behaviours and values, pose challenges to this process and provide counter-narratives to sport as a site of everyday domination (Carrington, 2009).

2.3.1: Skateboarding

Skateboarding is one such example, and has long been understood as offering alternatives to mainstream sports (Borden, 2019a; Chiu, 2009; Lombard, 2010). As Beal (1998) argues, for example, skateboarding is an example of a 'symbolic inversion', referring to an 'act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic' (Babcock, 1978: 14). Indeed, as Borden (2019a: 24) notes 'skateboarding, like many other kinds of subculture, has separated itself from cosy clubs, regulated schools and organized teams' being more irrational in organisation and independently creative. These alternatives lie in the more cultural and lifestyle-driven elements of skateboarding. Indeed, as the external pressures of commercialisation and mainstream incorporation have intensified within skateboarding over recent decades, the term 'skate culture' has emerged largely uncontested amongst professional and everyday practitioners, which is understood to denote the lifeworld of skateboarding, a practice which is seen by its practitioners as having its own lifestyle,

practices and history that unite millions across the globe (O'Connor, 2020). It is something that in practicing, one embodies a particular world view, built around a mass of shared codes, values, norms and rituals through which skateboarding has become 'a field of communication, understanding and symbolism' (O'Connor, 2020: 9). From its beginnings it has been rooted in ideas of self-expression and authentic identity formation through repeated bodily practice (Abulhawa, 2020) that have now grown to produce a shared stock of knowledge that unites a like-minded community (Schwier, 2019). As Borden (2019a: 3) writes, 'within skateboarding's distinctive outlook we find that the most valued of life attributes are not fame, wealth, winning or status but are – or should be – participation, expression, satisfaction and community'.

   Contrary to the strict governance of sports such as football or rugby, skateboarding has a history of self-governance. Early skate culture embodied the notion of 'Do-It-Yourself', or DIY practice. Early practitioners in the 1960s would often build boards independently, for example, sourcing parts from roller skates and whatever wood they could find due to the lack of availability of commercial boards (Borden, 2019a). Such self-reliance has continued to be a part of skate identity until today and its DIY elements are closely connected to the explorative creativity of the culture (O'Connor, 2020). The most literal example of this is the numerous 'DIY spots' that exist across the globe, referring to skate spots made by skateboarders and others moulding concrete and other materials into the urban environment (Vivoni and Folsom-Fraser, 2021). But such a DIY ethos also permeates skate culture's philosophies. As Lombard (2010) writes, skateboarders prioritise their own control over skateboarding and its culture, rather than allowing its practice to become defined by some externally imposed label. As a result, skateboarding has evolved not through some preconceived, quantified, and controlled ideas of performance (Cantin-Brault, 2015), but has instead been created by all manner of skateboarders, interpretations, and articulations (O'Connor, 2020). In this sense, skateboarding is not a single, predetermined thing, but is made up of a variety of inputs, including photography, film, art, construction, social enterprise and more that all contribute to the culture, opening space for community and diversity (Borden, 2019a). Indeed, such notions of community are something long seen in skateboarding.

   As such, as Willing and Shearer (2015) note, skateboarding is not simply a subculture of young males but a fluid and diverse activity in which all manner of identities also contribute to skateboarding culture, community, and activism. Belonging in skateboarding therefore relies more on shared, social, cultural, and performative components that broaden the way individuals feel connected, more than traditional competitive sports (Willing et al., 2019). Indeed, describing skateboarding as a lifestyle

religion, O'Connor (2020) recognises a powerful sense of 'communitas' within the culture. This refers to a sense of community in which the individual 'is gifted with an immediate and genuine sense of the other, the plural of beings' (Turner, 2012: 6).

It is fitting then, that when speaking of 'skate culture' that we realise that there is not one skateboarding monoculture, but that there are many different localised skateboarding cultures and communities that are embedded within this that all contribute to skateboarding. This may be in different countries, towns, or neighbourhoods, and amongst people of different genders, sexualities, races, ethnicities, and disability status. Li (2022), for example, writes of how the Chinese concept of Guanxi often guides behaviours in the Chinese skateboarding industry. It is argued that 'in the age when skateboarding has developed into a highly commercialised industry, Chinese skateboarders still subscribe to a cultural-specific principle of guanxi favouritism' in which 'there is a clear emphasis on a moral obligation for the skateboarder at the higher positions of the skateboarding hierarchy to give back to the culture' (Li, 2022: 201). On a smaller scale, Holsgens (2019: 382) gives an account of how skateboarders in Seoul, South Korea 'acquire highly specialised and site-specific skills'. Here, the 'skater's eye' is found to respond more to purpose-built recreational skateparks as opposed to the unfamiliarity and unreliability of the urban environment. In this instance, the city presents itself to skateboarders as an unhomely space that does not resonate with their carefully acquired skills and talents that are built more around the familiarity of the skatepark (*Ibid*.).

On a smaller scale still, we see variety in the ways people present themselves as skateboarders. Stefani Nurding for example, skateboarder and owner of the skateboarding brand Salon, presents a distinctively 'girly' identity through skateboarding, challenging the built-in masculinity of traditional skate culture. She uses Instagram to post photos and videos of her performance of skateboarding tricks integrated with feminine fashion, motherhood and discussions on the relationship between contemporary feminism, body politics, and skateboarding (Abulhawa, 2020).

Moreover, as Williams (2020) makes clear, race and racism have also affected how people of colour have experienced skateboarding, navigating, and negotiating their experiences differently depending on the racial, socio-cultural, and generational context in which they grew up and live. Through his analysis of elite skaters of colours' individual experiences, Williams (2020) shows how their encounters with skateboarding and its surrounding culture allowed many to develop their practice into a site for the exploration of race and racial politics, using it as a form of identity, self-expression, and power within a racialised USA. From this perspective, 'skateboarding becomes a site where the

culture and ideologies of race and racial formations converge and affect new iterations of skateboarding culture and racial politics for future generations' (Ibid.: 110).

Skateboarding is thus many different things to many different people, manifesting in ways informed by localised context. In turn, skateboarding itself is made up of a variety of cultures and communities. Realising this, it is important to make clear that mentions of 'skate culture' throughout this thesis refer to a specific UK-based culture of skateboarding, due to my empirical focus on Skateboard GB, the BBC's coverage of the Tokyo 2020 Games. Moreover, the ethnographic accounts presented in Chapter 6 refer to my time skating specifically in London and Hertfordshire based account of skateboarding, much of which refers to my own time spent in my local skateboarding community that is comprised almost completely of white males.

As a result, this research is largely informed by my own positionality and subsequent access to and experience of skateboarding as a white male. Indeed, it is the case that skateboarding generally remains a male-dominated activity (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). This is largely due to skateboarding's reliance on subcultural capital (O'Connor, 2020). Here, codes of authentic participation within skateboarding are often based on gendered notions of risk-taking, pain and general urban masculinity that work to exclude those that do not conform to these. Additionally, gatekeepers at both the grassroots and in the industry are often cis-gendered white males (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). As Williams (2021) writes, however, skaters of colour have actively contributed to skate culture throughout its history and women, girls, non-binary, and queer communities have been carving out their own space in skate culture, although this does not always equate to equal participation and power (Abulhawa, 2020). As Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) note though, lifestyle sports, skateboarding included, do offer more progressive sites for improving gender relations.

2.3.2: Competition, or lack of, in Skateboarding

As a result of their emphasis on community and creativity, it is that case that skateboarders rarely feel as though they are in actual competition with one another. Beal's (1995) seminal text on skater behaviour amateur skateboarding contests exemplifies this. After attending three competitions, which were sponsored by the Colorado Skateboard Association, she noted that skateboarders used these contests to meet new people, learn new tricks and to skate on new and challenging courses. In this way, they used the events as an opportunity to meet their personal needs, rather than to adopt the Association's values of promoting sporting competition. Following interviews with skateboarders, for example, many of Beal's (1995) participants mentioned that they would not classify skateboarding

as a sport in the traditional sense, due to this lack of competition and rules. Another of her participants compared skateboarding to competitive sports noting that 'we don't skate *against* somebody; we skate *with* them' [original emphasis] (*Ibid:* 262). Although skill difference was often observed, it was not used to promote exclusivity or superiority above others. Instead, status was gained through promoting cooperation, with respect being earned through sharing tips, experiences, and encouragement from those more skilled and willingness to try for beginners, as one skateboarder mentioned 'in skating, if you are bad, no one makes you feel bad about that' (*Ibid*: 262). Moreover, individuals with an overly competitive nature, or deemed to be showing off their tricks, were looked down upon. Instead, it was more about whether someone is 'fun to be with' (*Ibid*: 257). In this sense then, through a lack of focus on competition, skateboarding sets itself apart from the individualised and economic rationalities of modern sports, being more focused on the 'doing' of skateboarding itself and community building rather than the production of inequality.

This is not to say that there is no competitive element in skateboarding. These competitions happen informally between skateboarders in the form of 'S.K.A.T.E[1]', or localised 'jams' at skateparks, but have also existed formally since the early 1960s, such as the first official skateboarding contest at Hermosa Beach in 1963 (Purpus, 2022). Since, it has been introduced to a variety of commercial competitions such as ESPNs' X Games, SLS and Vans Park Series. However, as Borden (2019a) notes, these competitions have done very little to change predominant skateboarding practices and discourses, and many skateboarders, both everyday and professional, remain ambivalent about these organised competitions.

Such ambivalence towards competition is often true even for participants in the competitions themselves. As professional skateboarder Chris Cole mentions, in the case of his performance in the SLS events, the competition is not his main focus, instead noting that 'I like being here representing the way I skate. To an outsider, a lot of us skate really similar, but if you are embedded in skateboarding you can see the difference in each person, you can spot the tiny differences and I am here to represent my side of skate' whilst also noting, in regards to his ability to be creative, that the competition 'holds me back as I have to work with the course and I have to work with the point systems and I only have so many goes' (Cole, in Bailey, 2016, *np*). In this sense, participation is more about creative expression and representing his own style, whilst he also realises the limits to participating in such a framework.

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[1] A game in which one skateboarder does a trick and other participants must copy that same trick. If they fail, they gain a letter, starting with S and so on to spell 'S.K.A.T.E'. A player loses when they are on 'S.K.A.T.E'.

As well as this, some skateboarders are openly hostile towards such competitive structures. When skateboarding was originally proposed for the 2012 London Olympics for example, an online petition appeared in 2010, was signed by 7546 people, and addressed to IOC president Thomas Bach, arguing that 'skateboarding is not a "sport" and we do not want skateboarding transformed to fit into the Olympic program. We feel that Olympic involvement will change the face of skateboarding and its individuality and freedoms forever'. Even now, many still write in the comments section of the petition, noting their angst towards competitive skateboarding (Care2 Petitions, 2020: *np*). Whilst skateboarding does have competitive and institutionalised forms then, for many skateboarders, both everyday and professional, these do not define or represent the values of skateboarding (Borden, 2019a). In this sense, skateboarding proposes an alternative model of physical activity as opposed to the neoliberalised sport model that the IOC and the Olympic Games so maintain.

Atkinson and Wilson (2002: 386) thus argue that alternative sporting cultures such as skateboarding can use bodily expression and performance to subvert the mainstream sporting systems of discipline and control. They note, for example, that a skateboard trick can be understood as a form of 'free expression', allowing 'a temporary escape or sense of empowerment through movement'. Indeed, for most participants of such sports, the value of participation lies in these creative and performative aspects of their activities (Wheaton, 2004). It has also been shown that skateboarding in a community development context can be used to benefit urban communities by promoting socially inclusive and democratic values in terms of race, class, and gender, as well as building capacity for collective action (Atencio et al., 2019). Similarly, Borden (2019b) notes how skateparks can help build friendships, self-confidence, social skills, cooperation, and a sense of belonging. Lastly, the Pushing Boarders events in 2018 and 2019 featured talks on how skateboarding and skateboarders can tackle prejudice, teach transferable skills, increase grassroots capacity, create rich cultural heritage sites and more.

2.3.3: Skateboarding's Inclusion into the Olympic Games

As of summer 2016, however, skateboarding has been an official Olympic sport. It debuted at the delayed Tokyo 2020 Summer Games and is set to make a second appearance as an additional sport at the Paris 2024 Summer Games. At the LA 2028 Games, it will appear as part of the core programme. Through its Olympic introduction then, skateboarding is becoming located in disciplinary practices located outside of its indigenous context. As already mentioned, the Olympics is not the first example of such a process, but it is the most recent and certainly the most extreme.

The Tokyo 2020 Games marked the first time in Olympic history that the IOC granted OCOGs the ability to make proposals for the inclusion of one or more new sports and events in the Olympic programme. This was done in line with the Olympic Agenda 2020, which focuses on innovation and youth, ultimately attempting to encourage youth viewing numbers of the Games and participation in sports in general outside of the Games (IOC, 2014). The overall aim of the Agenda is to add the most value possible to the Games (Tokyo 2020, 2015). Tokyo 2020 was the first OCOG to take hold of this opportunity, responding to the Agenda and making a formal proposal to the IOC for the addition of skateboarding, surfing, sport climbing, karate and baseball in September 2015.

Despite the pandemic-related difficulties of the Tokyo 2020 Games, preparations for Paris 2024 have been progressing steadily. On 21st February 2019, Paris 2024 proposed four additional sports, including reappearances from skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing and a new addition of breakdancing, or breaking, for a total of 12 events between each. These were provisionally confirmed at the 134th IOC Committee Session in Lausanne on 25th June 2019. Commenting on this, Paris 2024 OC President Tony Estanguet mentioned that the new sports would make the Olympics 'more urban' and 'more artistic', and that Paris 2024's role is 'to enrich the Olympic programme with new sports to reach new audiences, especially the youth' (Goh, 2019; *np*). Clearly then, and as Thomas Bach states, 'the four sports that Paris has proposed are all totally in line with Olympic Agenda 2020' (IOC, 2019a; *np*). From there, the inclusion of these events was finalised at an IOC Executive Board meeting on 7th December 2020 (IOC, 2020a).

Skateboarding's appearance at the Paris 2024 Games, and likewise for its appearance in Tokyo, will be categorised as an additional sport, since it would have not yet completed enough Olympic cycles to become part of the core programme. However, for the LA 2028 Games, skateboarding, along with surfing and sport climbing, is set to be added to the LA 2028 Olympic programme as one of the core 28 sports. For LA 2028 OC chairperson Casey Wasserman (in Morgan, 2021: *np*), 'these quintessential West Coast sports share a youthful energy and creative vibe and will be perfect for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics […] These sports will bring fresh excitement and relevance to the Olympic Games in America and connect the Olympics with younger fans across Los Angeles and around the world'. This move shows that the Olympic Movement is fully committed to continuing to alter the branding of the Games towards a more youthful audience. Appearing as a core sport also means that the governing bodies of these sports will be entitled to a share of the broadcasting revenue from LA 2028, which is not the case for the Tokyo or upcoming Paris Games.

For a sport to be able to appear at the Olympic Games, it must have an international governing body that is recognised by the IOC, which skateboarding did not have prior to its inclusion into the Games. In light of this, skateboarding was picked up by Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports (FIRS), founded in Switzerland in 1924, and recognised by the IOC as the official governing body for roller sports since the 1960s. FIRS previously had zero affiliation with skateboarding, but instead a long history in inline skating, inline freestyle, inline figure skating, hockey and others. There were other organisations that claimed to be the governing body of skateboarding such as World Cup Skateboarding (WCS), the World Skate Federation (WSF) and the International Skate Federation (ISF), each with their own claims to skateboarding. The IOC denied recognition to the other organisations however on the basis of their dependence on third-party commercial organisations (Batuev and Robinson, 2017).

Nevertheless, FIRS and the IOC depended heavily on the ISF, who in turn had relationships with other major commercial actors such as SLS, the X Games and WCS. In this sense, the IOC acknowledged the ISF's 'extensive experience and expertise in the organisation of skateboarding events and the representation of skateboarders' (IOC, 2019b, *np.*). Indeed, the ISF was different to FIRS in that it sought 'to protect skateboarding, to make sure that if it enters the international sport scene, which is the Olympics, it will be represented in a proper way' (Gary Ream, ISF president in Batuev and Robinson, 2017). The relationship here then was such that the IOC worked with FIRS on the more bureaucratic side of organising, such as anti-doping measures etc., whilst it depended on the ISF as a gatekeeper into the commercial skateboarding world, ensuring their 'engagement with the skateboarding community and support for the unique character of the sport' (IOC, 2019b, *np.*). Ultimately, FIRS used the ISF to gain cultural legitimacy in the skateboarding scene, attempting to achieve acceptance from skateboarders and an 'insider' status despite its 'outsider nature' (see Batuev and Robinson, 2017). Indeed, as Lombard (2010) writes, skateboarders are wary of corporations that are understood to attempting to break into skate culture from the outside, since this is often read as a loss of authenticity and control over the culture.

In 2017, FIRS and IFS merged to create World Skate with an aim to 'provide a more modern platform for the management of all skate disciplines, while allowing autonomy for the governance, development and management of skateboarding through a commission chaired by Gary Ream' (World Skate, 2017a, *np.*). For former FIRS president Sebatino Aracu, this move was needed as if they were to 'ensure the proper representation of skateboarding in Tokyo, it was necessary to involve the associations that represent the whole of skateboarding culture, including top athletes, event

organisers, community organisations, NGOs (non-governmental organisation], and industry advisors'
whilst, for Gary Ream, it would allow them to 'put on an incredible show in Tokyo' (*Ibid.*). The move to
World Skate was thus a way to create for the first time an overarching governing body for
skateboarding as per the IOC's needs, yet to do so in a way that would remain grounded in the wider
skateboarding community, echoing the earlier notion of cultural legitimacy.

As well as having an IF, each participating nation in the Olympics must also have an NF. These work
with national Olympic teams to oversee the sport on a national scale. Examples in skateboarding
include Skateboard GB in the UK and USA Skateboarding in America. These NFs are responsible for
curating national competitive frameworks, training athletes, arranging the formal teams in their
respective countries as well as promoting the sport more generally and seeking both public and
private funding opportunities for it. These organisations are also very new in the skateboarding scene
and industry, Skateboard GB was established in 2016 for example, and is the first example of specific
governing bodies making their appearance both on the international and national level. As a
consequence of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics then, there is now a whole institutional
framework made up of private actors, that work also with the public sector in their respective
countries, together building a style of skateboarding that fits the Olympic system. Whilst it is the case
that these organisations may work closely with the grassroots skate scenes, such as the multiple
projects Skateboard GB has completed with local skate communities, it is the case that on the
competitive level, these organisations work to mould skateboarding into a more neoliberalised form.

2.3.4: The Issue of Incorporation

Skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games thus shows that despite their alternative ethos,
lifestyle sports are in no way immune to commercialisation (Rinehart, 2000). Indeed, 'the allure and
excitement of lifestyle sport has been appropriated to sell every kind of product and service
imaginable, from cars and deodorant to holidays', which has in many ways led to an erosion of their
oppositional character (Wheaton, 2010: 1058). This 'co-option' has been a central debate in the wider
literature on lifestyle sports for some time (Wheaton, 2004).

Now, there are dedicated apparel and equipment brands and these activities have been
incorporated into a variety of media forms, such as dedicated films, like *Dogtown and Z Boys*, or
specialised magazines like *Thrasher* or *Snowboarder* stock physical shelves and virtual feeds. There are
also video games, such as EA's hugely popular and successful *Skate* series, or Ubisoft's *Shaun White
Snowboarding*. These activities are also used in place branding strategies, as is the case for surfing

hubs in parts of Australia, South Africa, or Cornwall in the UK. Large-scale artificial areas are also constructed, two major examples in the UK being the £25m The Wave surfing facility in Bristol or Folkestone's F51 multi-story skatepark complex, currently under construction with a bill of £17m. These activities also have sponsored celebrities such as Tony Hawk (skateboarding), Shaun White (snowboarding) and Kelly Slater (surfing) (Wheaton, 2013). There is thus a whole range of commercial ways in which one can experience lifestyle sports, all of which work together in a globalised network of sport, corporate sponsorship, and entertainment, sustaining a multi-million-dollar industry. Clearly then, these sports, traditionally considered as alternative, can and have been adapted to fit the mainstream context in multiple ways (Wheaton, 2013). Moreover, many of these sports now take place in the commercialised, competitive structures that on the grassroots, they seem to oppose (Rinehart, 2008; Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011). ESPN's X Games, for example, an annual competition of multiple action sports made its debut in 1995 and still continues yearly; snowboarding was introduced into the Nagano 1998 Winter Games in Japan, and breakdancing will make its Olympic debut at the Paris 2024 Summer Games.

Skateboarding has not been immune to this. The first commercial brands began to emerge at the start of its development in the late 1960s. Likewise, it has been part of the X Games since 1995, and SLS was created in 2010 by skateboarder/entrepreneur Rob Dyrdek to promote competitive street skating. In line with this, studies as early as Booth (1995: 193) have shown that 'organised competition was essential for public acceptance of their sport'. Now, as O'Connor (2020) notes, skateboarding revolves around and relates to the skate industry in many ways.

Celebrity skateboarders and the feats they can achieve on the board are very much the drivers of this industry, mimicking the way other individual celebrities from traditional sports brand and comport themselves in certain ways, alongside their incredible skill. As Snyder's (2017) work shows, professional skateboarders are fundamentally athletes who market both their skill and personality, since being an accomplished or gifted skater is not enough to grant access to professional status. In this sense, professional skateboarding is a popularity contest that differentiates access in terms of subcultural cool and social capital. This issue is raised by Sam Beckett, one of Skateboard GB's five chosen skateboarders to receive the UK Sport Aspiration Fund, in *BOARDERS* (Ranin, 2021), a recent documentary focusing on the UK skate scene during skateboarding's run up to Tokyo 2020. Here, Beckett notes how sponsorship is dictated by how well the company can market the skateboarder as cool, an inspiration to others, and essentially as someone that other people will want to be. This has led, he furthers to many career anxieties about himself not being cool enough or no longer relevant.

As well as a reliance on brands and celebrities, skateboarding has long had a reliance on media, whereby both mass and niche media have played a highly significant role in shaping skateboarding identities and cultural characteristics (Bock, 2019; Dupont, 2020; Borden, 2019a). Indeed, as Thorpe (2008) notes, media such as newspapers, television, videos, magazines, and zines introduce individuals to subcultural worlds, showcasing the normalised practices and ways of being in the respective culture. This is true for skateboarding whereby niche media publications such as *Thrasher, Transworld, Sidewalk,* The Berrics and others teach the norms, values, and structures of skateboarding (Borden, 2019a). They also provide an important arena in which certain individuals can circulate themselves and gain cultural capital (Buckingham, 2009). Traditionally, brands making full length videos, previously sold on DVD, showcasing their sponsored skateboarders individually in succession has been the main way of communicating skateboarding tricks, norms, and values, as well as creating commercial success. However, as Instagram has increased in popularity, these full-length videos have become less frequent whilst individual 'parts', a shorter length video of a few minutes, often posted on Instagram and YouTube, dedicated to a single skateboarder, have become increasingly common. As has the frequent uploading of single tricks or lines to Instagram.

Commercial competitions have also been a long-standing part of skateboarding culture, despite skateboarders' general dislike of overly competitive formats. As skateboarding was enjoying its second boom in popularity in the mid-1970s following the development of urethane wheels, many new events started to arise such as the National Bahne-Cadillac Skateboard Championships in Del Mar, first held in April 1975, attracting hundreds of competitors, mostly from California. There were also competitions in Australia such as the 1975 Victorian Skateboard Championships in Flinders Park, in 1976 New York had the World Invitational, whilst in 1977 the UK hosted skateboarding competitions in Crystal Palace (Borden, 2019a).

As street skating began to take hold in the late 1980s however, competitions became less important. The main exception to this was ESPN's Extreme Games, first launched in 1995 in Rhode Island to a live audience of 200,000, then rebranded the following year to X Games. This competition still exists today and continues to be one of the leading commercial skateboarding competitions along with SLS and Vans Park Series. The X Games, the self-defined worldwide leader in action sports, was created as an annual celebration of alternative sports, and has played a significant role in the global diffusion and expansion of the respective industries and cultures (Rinehart, 2000). The event, the 2021 edition of which was sponsored by Monster Energy, Wendy's, Pacifico Beer and GEICO, showcases events from a huge number of alternative sports such as motocross, BMXing,

skateboarding and also winter sports such as Snowboarding. For a long time, it was the ultimate forum for setting records and performing ever more technical and creative manoeuvres for international audiences, and so came to represent the pinnacle of 'extreme sports' (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011; Rinehart, 2008). The X Games thus served, as Rinehart (2008) makes clear, to capture the imagination of the youth market, transforming what he calls alternative sports, including skateboarding, to a television-ready format, spectacularising them through introducing exciting competitive formats such as highest air, but also through celebration of risk and injury. The events also draw on lifestyle-driven elements of their associated cultures such as live music, and have a general angsty and edgy vibe.

Over the years, the X Games had several competitors such as NBC's Gravity Games (1999-2006) and the Maloof Money Cup (2008-2012), but its most serious competitor emerged in 2010 in the form of former professional skateboarder turned entrepreneur Rob Dyrdek's SLS. Focusing solely on street skateboarding, SLS is a travelling competition, featuring a temporary skatepark consisting of street obstacles such as rails, banks, ledges, and stairs typically with colour-brightened elements contrasting a grey floor accompanied generally by a live audience, a judging panel, and a digital scoreboard that displays participants scores. The competition itself is made up of individually scored runs and tricks, with live commentary throughout. Currently, SLS's partners include Monster Energy, Tech Deck and others, but has previously included the likes of Nike SB and GoPro. It is argued that SLS was the final prerequisite step in the formation of skateboarding as an Olympic sport, introducing an unprecedented way of rating skateboarders, whereby each trick and run has a clear score and is shown following the completion of their trick or run on huge screens in the event hall, providing an objective way to measure the skater's movements. This ultimately became the accredited competition and judging format for Olympic street skating (Cantin-Brault, 2019).

This is all an example of skateboarding's incorporation into the capitalist system. Whilst it has its beginnings instead rooted in the creativity and DIY practice of youths in the 1960s, skateboarding is now firmly entrenched in the cycle of accumulation (see Harvey, 2003). Many skateboarders read this as a loss of authenticity of their culture and lifestyle. Indeed, for Cantin-Brault (2015: 63), these 'mega-contests' are attempts to make skateboarding an organised sport, showcasing skateboarding within a controlled environment and working to promote it within mainstream culture. They mark a loss in control over the organisation of skateboarding, rendering it suitable for a spectator-friendly environment in which actions and social relations are organised through individualised and competitive means. Its principles thus become stated by a sport system that wishes to promote

skateboarding as a specific and marketable thing, defining its rules and regulations (Cantin-Brault, 2015). In return, skateboarding is neoliberalised; it is restructured through competition and becomes a vessel for communicating such characteristics throughout society. This ongoing process within skateboarding embraces its rationalisation and quantification, and uses competition as a key feature. In this sense, skateboarding is being used as a mode of neoliberal governmentality, it contributes to the relaying of neoliberal discourse throughout sport and so increases the pervasiveness of neoliberalism throughout everyday life and society.

Figure 5: Leticia Bufoni skating at the Red Bull Paris Conquest skateboarding competition on 17th August 2021. Source: Victor Joly,Photo ID: 2191771123, https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/leticia-bufoni-brazil-competes-during-qualification-2191771123

2.3.5: Neoliberalised Spaces of Skateboarding

As skateboarding has become increasingly popular in this way, there has naturally been an increase in the number of purpose-built spaces in which skateboarders can enjoy their practice. On one level, this is in response to demand. As academic work investigating the purpose and function of formalised skate spaces shows however, the increase of these spaces is tied to the increasing prevalence of neoliberal urban governance. As Howell (2008) shows through an analysis of urban management in the United States, the motivations behind the expansion of skateparks throughout the country is based less on satisfying the community demands of skateboarders and more on the potential of skateparks to nurture personal responsibility, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism, all traditional characteristics of neoliberalism (see Section 2.1). Indeed, from the perspective of urban managers,

the benefits of skatepark construction are their tendency to encourage specific behaviours within skateboarders, such as securing funding for the construction of facilities, informally policing the area and taking personal responsibility for injury by refraining from raising liability cases.

Skateparks thus serve the purpose of containing skateboarders that might otherwise be skating in the streets whilst simultaneously cultivating behaviours and values that are deemed acceptable. Indeed, they are understood to teach its users 'self-management' by giving them ownership of these spaces, with skaters often supervising and policing them themselves. Likewise, it is noted that skateboarders are accepting of the risk of injury in skateboarding, and see themselves as personally responsible for this (*Ibid.*). Lastly, skateboarders are often seen as useful tools for the generation of private-public partnerships, attracting private companies to provide skateboarding opportunities who claim that their contributions to skateboarding are made for the public good in terms of health, character enhancing attributes and community building. (Beal et al., 2017). The state thus relinquishes themselves from responsibility towards urban spaces and their citizens, whilst and using skateparks to increase land value and further instil neoliberal subjectivities into society. It is therefore fittingly argued that these facilities are provided on neoliberal conditions, and are another mechanism through which to promote and normalise neoliberal discourses in everyday life (Howell, 2008).

As Beal et al. (2017) argue then, both public and private stakeholders are increasingly investing in skateparks in the USA due to their ability to benefit a neoliberalised conception of the 'public good'. In other cases, skateparks are used as attempts to weaken the self-governing nature of skateboarders. As Turner (2016) shows in Scotland, formal skateparks have become means of directly imposing a 'civilising process' onto skateboarders that use these spaces. Here, and similarly to other sporting activities, funding towards skateboarding has taken the form of a hegemonic model that pushes more 'civilised' behaviour patterns onto the users of skateparks. In such spaces, skateboarders find themselves wearing helmets, queuing and paying to enter, and abiding by opening times. The performance of the role of the good citizen thus takes preference to the inherent benefits of physical movement in informal settings (Turner, 2016).

As Turner (2017) writes, a consequence of this is that the alternative characteristics of these practices, namely a community led form of social organisation, are disregarded in favour of bringing them into direct contact with neoliberal structures of sport and society. This also applies to skateboarding's recent inclusion into the Olympics. In the UK, for example, Skateboard GB have designated multiple 'hub' skateparks around the country that the governing body are using as sites

for the development of competitive talent within skateboarding (Skateboard GB, 2021f). In doing so, the spaces of skateboarding are being pulled further into a format of sport that places competition above all else. This thesis builds on this well-established work, looking not at how the formal spaces of skateboarding are being used to further the prevalence of neoliberalism within the practice, but how the skateboarding's newly found presence as an Olympic sport is working to further neoliberalise the conceptualisations, representations, and behaviours found within. In this way then, it furthers our understanding of how sport and physical activity are important arms of this civilising process.

2.3.6: Resilience in Skateboarding

As argued in Section 2.1.6 however, neoliberalisation is an uneven and oft-contested process. As such, despite skateboarding's long history of commercialisation and competitions, skateboarding still exhibits the characteristics and rituals that set it apart from neoliberal sport. As Lombard (2010) writes, the theme of resistance and the DIY ethos of skateboarding continues to resonate throughout the lifestyle and continue to be important in its contemporary practice. Firstly, competition does not represent the most common experience of skateboarding by any means, and these competitions have done little to change skateboarding. Instead, it is characterised by a commitment to the lifestyle and culture of skateboarding (O'Connor, 2020). Through such a commitment, practitioners are able to open a different realm of reality, one of play and performance, thereby creating an alternative context in which the everyday is transformed. Together, these practices work to establish a repertoire of meaning in skateboarding, leading to skateboarding becoming 'a central and meaningful motif in the lives of countless individuals who have committed years and sometimes even decades to this demanding, difficult, and sometimes dangerous pastime' (O'Connor, 2020: 2).

Skateboarders are thus very self-aware of their culture, its characteristics and histories, and due to the deep attachments that practitioners have to these, they often seek to preserve them despite its ongoing commercialisation (O'Connor, 2020). As Yochim (2010: 88) writes then, 'skateboarders frequently communicate to instruct one another in skateboarding's core principles and values'. In this way, skateboarding is a culture that is constantly negotiated in discussion with the community, with skaters being critical of developments within skateboarding, evaluating their overall value and contribution to the culture and lifestyle. Skateboarders have thus been shown to hold enormous power as consumers, in many cases deciding the fate of companies entering their realm (*Ibid*.). As Lombard (2010) exemplifies, Nike attempted to enter the skateboarding market in the late 1990s, releasing skateboarding shoes and an advertising campaign to go with it, but withdrew the shoe within a year since failed to gather any profit. This is because skateboarders were 'concerned about

Nike's motivation because there was not a long-standing commitment to the skateboarding community' (Wheaton and Beal, 2003: 169).

These characteristics lead Schweer (2019) to argue that skateboarding is resilient, constantly reacting to the forces that pull it into the mainstream, evaluating them and responding in ways that preserve the core values of skate culture. Skateboarding can thus be understood as a form of artistic critique, responding to commercialisation in unpredictable, ever-changing, and creative ways. To illustrate this, Schweer (2019) uses the example of what he calls 'heterodox skateboarding', championed by Swedish skateboarder Pontus Alv. This makes use of tricks such as wallrides, wallies, slappies, no-complys, powerslides, and footplants, all of which were often marginalised from mainstream skateboarding and are rarely, if ever, seen in standardised competition settings. In 2005, Alv self-produced a video entitled Strongest of the Strange, which included these tricks and was made as a response to previous sponsors being unwilling to let him include these tricks in their videos. Whilst over time, these tricks have become trendier within skateboarding, Strongest of the Strange can be read as a response to the codification of skateboarding that was emerging around the time of its release. Moreover, the video made use mainly of DIY spots, providing further critique of this and re-stating skateboarding's connection to its DIY roots. In this sense then, despite skateboarding's ongoing commercialisation, skateboarders constantly innovate new ways that distinguish themselves from the flattening tendencies of neoliberal sport (*Ibid*.).

Pontus Alv's case is not the only example of skateboarders exhibiting resilience. As mentioned above, skateboarding communities across the globe are constantly shifting in response to its incorporation. Due to the complexities of skateboarding's incorporation into the mainstream, this should be read as resilience and not resistance. As Macleavy et al. (2021) write, resistance entails a form of oppositional practice, or pushback, against dominant systems of oppression. Resilience on the other hand refers to the strategies of endurance that are adopted in order to facilitate everyday living, but do not greatly change circumstances of oppression or systems of domination (Katz, 2001; 2004). It entails people making their own histories, but not under conditions of their own choosing, achieved by small acts of getting by and coping with everyday realities. Resilience is therefore often more subtle and less confrontational than resistance (Anwar and Graham, 2020). As Grove and Chandler (2017) argue then, resilience is about living with and adapting to change, and an effort to continue despite major systems of domination. Skateboarders' attempts to preserve skate culture then should be read as a method to maintain its general characteristics despite its incorporation, rather than as a way to challenge them in an oppositional sense. Moreover, despite skateboarding's

anti-institutional and DIY ethos, it is the case that some instances of incorporation are supported if there are clear benefits for skate culture such as greater public recognition for skateboarding, enhanced facilities, or greater career opportunities (Lombard, 2010). Indeed, in some cases within resilience, we see possibilities of benefiting from this change (Grove and Chandler, 2017). On these terms then, the ongoing attempts by skateboarders to preserve skate culture despite its inclusion into the Olympics, which exemplifies the increasing neoliberalisation of skateboarding, can be read as a form of resilience towards this process.

It is the case however, that in the public realm, resilience has emerged as way to repackage neoliberal discourses of individual durability, calculative practice and self-responsibility in which resilience is a key feature (Macleavy et al. 2021). As such, resilience itself has been characterised as a mode of governmentality (Joseph, 2013). This has included resilience as a quality demanded by public policy in the context of austerity and worsening inequality, a central term in popular culture such as self-help literature, lifestyle magazines, reality television and a growing social media culture focussed on positive thinking and gratitude. Together, these promote discourses based on the ability to 'bounce back' against challenges, characterising resilience as a measure of character and ability to succeed in neoliberal society (Gill and Orgad, 2018). Sport is not indifferent to this malign characterisation of resilience. Popular sport cultures often celebrate those who can overcome difficulties and exert themselves physically against all odds, for example (Sheppard, 2019). Likewise, academic explorations of resilience in sport show how developing resilience is a key part of the road to sporting excellence (Hill et al., 2018).

Such an understanding of resilient subjects in neoliberal society rests crucially on a governmentality approach that characterises neoliberalism as the diffusion of discourses throughout society, altering subjectivities at the individual level (MacLeavy et al., 2021). By understanding resilience as a performative and generative strategy of existence however, rather than focussing on the resilient subject as a feature of neoliberalism, we can see how people can work together to offer a wider set of subjectivities, enabling us to recognise points of transgression within the dominant order of discourse. Alongside such configurations of resilience, community becomes as a key site for enacting these generative performances. What we see here is the power of community and connection to develop strategies of living in a world that works to reduce communities to isolated individuals. In this way, self-organising can be seen as a more general move to community-led, ground-up initiatives (*Ibid*.) than an individually organised neoliberal ideal. In this sense, resilience can offer sites that destabilise the neoliberal norm, offering counter-discourses and practices that instead highlight the power of

collectivity over the primacy of the individual. Despite not actively resisting systems of domination then, resilience still has political significance and power, and it is in its creative and collective output in which this lies.

Since these acts are about adapting to change then, they are not separate from the systems of domination they serve to critique. Instead, we see the reorganising of subjective arrangements as to be able to tolerate disturbances (Lentzos and Rose, 2009). Sites of resilience are thus situated and dynamic, called into being by different imaginaries of the present and future and showing the tactics to create them. They are a reaction to the norm, emerging through interactions with the temporal ontologies of the contemporary moment (MacLeavy et al., 2021). In this way, Cooper (2013) argues that resilient subjects can create everyday utopias in which alternative social futures can emerge. Whilst it may not be a predetermined or purposeful act, it is still performative, based on a cooperative form of politics. Within these sites of resilience, we see that it is not simply an innate capacity for survival, but opens up new ways of being in the world that are not organised by injustice, in turn highlighting its political significance and potential. In this way, resilience exemplifies the hopeful creation of new forms and futures, whilst in doing so revealing the limits of the present (Grove and Chandler, 2017). As mentioned, community and communicative construction play a critical role in the development of skateboarding (Schwier, 2019). Through their evaluations of skateboarding's incorporation then, and the reactions that follow this, skateboarding becomes a political act that provides alternative ways of doing and understanding sports that are not based around the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism, providing more egalitarian discourses and practices of fun and enjoyment that are built around community and shared appreciation rather than competition.

2.3.7: Jouissance in Skateboarding

Skateboarders, therefore, do not participate to win. They participate for the sake of skateboarding, to connect with others for little other reason than to have fun (Borden, 2019a; Nolan, 2003). Skateboarding thus has implications for how we understand participation in sport and physical activity. At its core, physical activity is a site of pleasure and enjoyment (Andrews, 2006). Enjoyment has long been acknowledged as a foundation of motivation in sport. It has been cited as one of the most common reasons for participating in sport worldwide and as a key component in the ongoing commitment to one's practice (De Knop et al., 1996). This is the case of grassroots practitioners but can also be seen in the retrospective accounts of elite performers that often document enjoyment as a crucial element of their participation (McCarthy and Jones, 2007). This is also true for fans and audiences of sport, with loyal fans supporting and celebrating their teams, or viewers of the Olympic

Games celebrating the struggles and achievements of others (Pringle, 2015c). Indeed, arguably no other cultural form displays the intensity and extensity of passions generated by fans' engagement with sport. Sport's tacit visceral physicality, dramatic uncertainty and subjective interpellation thus make it a compelling and seductive aspect for both spectators and participants alike (Andrews, 2006). As a result of its ubiquity then, pleasure and enjoyment in sport are often seen as a taken-for-granted concept that needs no further explanation (Pringle, 2015b).

Furthermore, Scanlan and Simons (1992: 202-203.) define enjoyment in sport as 'a positive affective response to sport experience that reflects generalised feelings such as pleasure, liking and fun'. Investigating enjoyment in sport, many scholars have turned to the concept of 'jouissance', or as it is commonly translated in these works, 'joyousness' or 'enjoyment' (Black, 2021; Newman, 2014, Caudwell, 2015). Roland Barthes' (1975) scholarship has been important in understandings of jouissance. He characterises jouissance as an instrument through which we live joyful and blissful lives and so can produce self-actualised forms of embodiment that remove the social self from the constraints of the existing order. Since sport at its most basic is a form of performance rather than an artefact of this performance, it can represent a temporary triumph of process over product. It is within this moment that the spontaneous inspiration of performance escapes, however fleetingly, the tendency of neoliberalism to reduce all social and cultural processes to external products. In this way, it is argued that sport can hold out the possibility of remaining playful, grasping pleasure and keeping reality at bay (Whannel, 2012).

Jouissance does not invariably induce freedom from the workings of power, however. Rather it is mobilised in many cases to allow power to operate in a more covert and insidious manner (Pringle, 2015c). Indeed, for Foucault (2007), happiness and pleasure are bound up in various parts of the neoliberal project. As Kingsbury (2008) argues for example, pleasure and enjoyment function to maintain emotional dimensions and mechanisms of class-based ideologies, racialised and gendered relations, nationalistic movements and the capitalist production and consumption of commodities. In this way, jouissance plays a role in broader processes of governmentality and the formation of neoliberal subjectivities, and thereby within social, cultural, political, and economic power relations (Binkley, 2011). For Foucault (2007) then, the realisation of happiness, specifically men's happiness, is key to the strengthening and increasing the powers of the state. From a psychological perspective, this is a form of 'positive psychology', the aim of which is to make people happy. The task of the state and free market then, is to create the conditions, or teach the specific values, norms, and techniques through which appreciative self-regard can be intentionally cultivated by individuals themselves

(Blinkley, 2011). As such, the effectiveness of neoliberal governmentality rests on the ways in which happiness is 'drawn on and constituted into state utility: making men's happiness the state's utility, making men's happiness the very strength of the state' (Foucault, 2007: 327). The utility that this sentiment refers to is the increase in the productive capacity of the state's population, with productivity understood to be directly related to the popular level of contentedness. As a result, the 'happiness of individuals is a requirement for the survival and development of the state. It is an instrument, and not simply a consequence' (Foucault, 1998: 158).

Realising that happiness and pleasure, or jouissance as I term it in this thesis, is wrapped up in the materialisation of power relations, and that it is a key part of sport performance, Pringle et al. (2015) argues that sporting pleasures are thus worthy of critical examination. As argued above, sport practice is never static, but dependent on historical context (Andrews, 2006). As varied as types of sport practice have become, they are today increasingly commodified, restrictive, formulaic, and fraught with surveillance (Markula and Pringle, 2006). Their spectacle value has accelerated whilst participation is ever more elite, exclusive, and competitive. The actions of those taking part are thus directed down a specific path. Through the governance of sporting competitions for example, participation becomes shaped by broader systems of policy, statutes, by-laws and rules that direct sport performance and thus define how enjoyment is experienced (Pringle, 2015a). This is not to say that participants in competitive sport do not enjoy their efforts, but that such a form of sport has co-opted jouissance and limited the ways it can be achieved since the primary aim of participation is to win at the expense of others. This is bound up in what Hughes and Coakley (1991) call 'the sport ethic'. This works as an exclusive guideline for behaviour and participation in competitive sports which emphasises positive norms such as sacrifice for the game, seeking distinction from others, taking risks and challenging limits. Those that conform to the ethic are understood as 'a real athlete' (*Ibid*.). It follows then that participants of sports achieve jouissance in ways that are determined by this context, nullifying its transgressive and emancipatory potential (Rinehart, 2015).

Sport media is also involved in such manipulation of jouissance. As Pringle (2015c) notes, sport broadcasts are constructs that have been produced through various media techniques with intention to create pleasurable spectacles to hook viewers and make profits. In the case of international competitions, for example, jouissance is structured through national fantasy and myth (Black, 2021). In such cases, 'the nation' works to procure a unique significance in forms of enjoyment and desire whereby passionate fans share an enjoyment of and belief in their national team. These fantasies centre around past and potential future sporting success and so encourage one to watch, support and

partake in national spectacles and associated national rivalries. Through highly mediated consumption then, sport provides a shared cultural practice that serves to materialise and maintain relations with one's nation (Black, 2021).

Nevertheless, many have been seduced by the multiple pleasures that sport offers, and these pleasures subsequently shape their identities and lifestyles. This is especially true in skateboarding, which has evolved with an incredibly strong sense of identity. It is thus important to think about basic joy in movement, to understand how it is characterised and conceptualised and to ask why and for whom this form of pleasure works (Rinehart, 2015). Returning to Barthes' interpretation of jouissance that characterises it as holding some transgressive potential, Newman (2014) argues that by updating our conception of jouissance in sporting practice, we can imagine new pathways forward for sport and the potential it can hold beyond the economically generative, namely in the ways it might also bring social and cultural transformations. In this line of thought, there is still transcendental potential in jouissance through sport, a form of enjoyment that helps us understand and move outside of the social, political and market structures of oppression that works on active bodies (*Ibid.*).

Through its embedded resilience, skateboarding in many cases provides a mode of physical activity through which its participants can still realise jouissance through ways that refuse to conform to the dictates of neoliberal sport. In this way, whilst jouissance is indeed an important arm of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2007), it can also be thought of as a site of resilience, furthering our understanding of the role of happiness and pleasure in the formation of broader power relations in neoliberal society. Through their participation, skateboarders champion the process over the product of their practice, maintaining a focus on the act of skateboarding rather than the products of their action. All the while, this is embedded within a context of comradery through which skateboarders celebrate one another and their achievements. In this way, skateboarding realises a mode of jouissance that escapes the order of neoliberal sport. It is in this way that skateboarders, and skateboarding, are resilient. The crux of this thesis then is an exploration of how skateboarding is being brought further into the neoliberal sports sphere through its introduction into the Games and how skateboarders are exhibiting resilience to this process. Indeed, as I will show in both Chapter 5 and 6, in parallel to skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games, grassroots skateboarders are still enjoying their practices in ways that do not align with the Games' focus on competitive individualism. They do so through valuing collectivity and taking joy in the ability to hang out with a like-minded community. They also continue to enjoy the process of skateboarding rather than the product of activity, challenging neoliberal sport's emphasis on directing activity towards an external

outcome. Indeed, in many ways, skateboarding is unique. Through the political possibilities provided through its resilience, it is something that we can learn from, providing, as Harvey (2001) would write, spaces of hope.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Introduction: A Mixed-Methods Approach

This thesis is concerned with examining how skateboarding's debut inclusion into the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is 'neoliberalising' the practice at the elite and grassroots levels. To do so, an involved qualitative mixed-method approach was adopted, with different methods being used to adapt to the methodological requirements of each unit of analysis. Such an approach entails the application of more than one method in the design and carrying out of a research project and has become increasingly popular in geography and social science more widely. This is done as to utilise the strengths of a variety of methods, each generating particular insights and data that can broaden the researcher's understanding of the issue at hand and improve the effectiveness with which it is addressed (McKendrick, 2020).

Planning mixed-method research thus requires an understanding of a range of methods and how different types of research and analysis can interrogate different processes and interactions (Elwood, 2010). Whilst there is no fixed way to do mixed-method research, it is usually done to collect complementary data from different sources in order to investigate the particularities of a multifaceted research problem (McKendrick, 2020). Specifically, as Elwood (2010) writes, mixed-method approaches are beneficial for researching processes that operate at multiple spatial scales as they lend themselves to the articulating of relationships between broader structural processes and localised contexts. As such, a multi-methods approach was beneficial here as to capture the ways that skateboarding's inclusion into the Games plays out at the elite and grassroots levels and how the two interact.

Conducting mixed-method research necessitates engaging with questions regarding epistemology and assumption (Timans et al., 2019). Indeed, critical work on mixed-method research is mainly framed in epistemological terms. Critiques of using multiple methods for a research project argue that methodological interpretation is at the core of the researcher's knowledge claim, with methods thus being used as unproblematic representations of different epistemologies (ways of generating knowledge). In this case, there are underlying assumptions made as to 'what works' that can undermine the study's validity by determining research practice (McKendrick, 2020).

Feminist research on science and objectivity has shown however that epistemology and method are not necessarily linked in fixed ways and so do not rigidly determine one another (Haraway, 1991). Instead, they can be actively engaged and reconstructed by researchers for a variety of intellectual purposes (Lawson, 1995, McLafferty, 1995). Such scholarship has provided conceptual space for mixed methods to flourish. In this line of thought, it is argued that since knowledge is situated, and different ways of knowing are inherently partial, researchers should focus on the productive complementarity of multiple methods, building a better understanding of a research issue when deployed together due to their different perspectives and attentions. The philosophical and epistemological assumptions that inform research design are thus acknowledged and indeed should be intentionally mixed to overcome limitations and produce more comprehensive and insightful research (McKendrick, 2020). As such, mixing epistemologies is feasible when combined with careful consideration of when and how to integrate multiple forms of data collection and modes of analysis (Elwood, 2010). By doing so, some researchers contend that a mixed-method approach entails its own unique epistemology that bridges traditional divisions between, for example, positivist, realist, or constructivist approaches (Timans et al., 2019). Mixed-method approaches are thus important precisely because they confront and reframe established tenants of research practice, giving space for unique and progressive methodologies that are carefully tailored to the specialised needs of the project (Elwood, 2010).

I use the term 'mixed-method' in this thesis as opposed to 'multi-method' as to reflect the interdependence of the methods on one another. Whilst the purpose of using mixed methods is to respond to the particularity of the research demands, the deployment of multiple methods in a single research project means that their use is not isolated from one another. A crucial part of credible and rigorous mixed-method research is thus showing how findings in one area are used to contextualise and inform understanding of other findings (McKendrick, 2020). This gives validity to the mixing of epistemologies by making clear the ways in which they interact. Whilst it may be argued that independence in method and analysis is needed to ensure that results are not influenced by initial research, interdependence was important to this research as to capture the complexity of the issue and show the relationships between the elite and grassroots levels. Methods were interdependent in that they were undertaken concurrently and applied with reference to one another. The analysis of results was thus also similarly interdependent, since I interpreted the meanings of multiple data sets with respect to the broader processes of neoliberalisation and resilience that played across and united them. The analytical chapters are thus laid out 'chronologically'. The first explains the governmental processes required to ensure skateboarding is fit for the Olympic Games. The second

then deals with skateboarding's debut Olympic broadcast whilst the final chapter shows how grassroots skateboarding is responding to its inclusion and the discourses that this process circulates. They are thus interdependent in that each chapter advances on from the previous, building a complete story of skateboarding's neoliberalisation and resilience as occurring through its introduction into the Olympic Games.

In Hitchings and Latham's (2020) review of qualitative methods in human geography, they call for researchers to be clearer about the issues faced in the research, outlining the things that went wrong or perhaps not as planned. Like many others, this project was disrupted greatly by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to various social distancing measures and travel restrictions, many qualitative researchers working on projects unrelated to the pandemic have been forced to transition from face-to-face data collection to other digitally inclined forms such as telephone or internet-based research (Lobe et al., 2020). In the original proposal, the project was set out to include fieldwork in Tokyo, as well as London. This would have included in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the UK and Tokyo, in which the formal processes of skateboarding's inclusion into the Games could be discussed, as well as the motivations for this and desired outcomes for the future of skateboarding. The second section would have dealt with the live event, with my own attendance at some, or all, if possible, of the Olympic skateboarding events in Tokyo, including an in-depth ethnography of the event, with attention paid to the event production and staging, fan reactions, interactions with other attendants, and an overall grasp of the fluctuating affective atmospheres . Lastly, the project would have made use of ethnography within both the London and Tokyo skate scenes, seeking out the ways that skateboarders in these cities are responding and relating to skateboarding's inclusion into the Games.

Each of these approaches was affected in some way. In-depth interviews were exclusively online, rather than any face-to-face encounters. The inability to travel to Tokyo and attend the live events meant that analysis of the event took place through an examination of the BBC's televised broadcast. Likewise, ethnography was only possible in and around London, and this was also difficult to plan and carry out due to the recurrence of lockdowns and social distancing measures throughout the research stage.

Lastly, within any research project, there are issues of positionality that permeate it. Indeed, how researchers go about presenting ourselves and engaging with participants and what this means for how they subsequently speak with us demands attention as it is something that guides the research

process (Hitchings and Latham, 2019a). As McDowell (1992) writes then, researchers must recognise and take account of their own position and make this clear throughout their work. This is important for two reasons, since on one level, rather than them being an all-seeing and all-knowing researcher, their positionality can affect interpretations of research data (Rose, 1997). As such, researchers must be reflexive; aware of their own positions and potential subjective biases towards the topic at hand since knowledge is situated, meaning it is produced in specific circumstances and therefore largely depends on who its makers are (*Ibid.*).

What follows is thus an in-depth explanation of the methodology used for this project. Each method is dedicated a section consisting of sub-sections that give background information, justify its use, explain how it was used and then the critiques and issues that may arise from its use, including my own positionality as a white, male skateboarder with many years of practical skateboarding experience and involvement in skateboarding communities and culture. The composition is as follows:

- Section 3.2 explains the use of in-depth interviews
- Section 3.3 gives a description of Foucauldian discourse analysis and how this was used to analyse the Olympic skateboarding events.
- Section 3.4 builds on this description and shows how Foucauldian discourse analysis was used to examine the policies and practices of World Skate and Skateboard GB.
- Section 3.5 then shows how ethnography was used to research the spaces of everyday grassroots skateboarding.

3.2: In-Depth Interviews with Olympic Skateboarding Stakeholders

3.2.1: Method Background and Justification

Firstly, in-depth interviews formed a large part of the research. Interviews are often used to understand subjects' interpretations and lived experiences of social life. In qualitative research, they are generally driven by theoretical concerns, helping to generate an understanding of everyday life in relation to the research context (Dowling et al., 2016). They are flexible and can be carried out in many settings as well as used to question a wide variety of people, meaning they can help researchers to understand a wide range of positions and experiences (Hitchings and Latham, 2019a). For these reasons, interviews have been a primary method for qualitative research in human geography for several decades (Crang, 2002).

In this project, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used. These are a flexible style of interview in which the researcher sets some broad parameter questions that guide the interview whilst allowing for more spontaneous responses from the participants and unplanned avenues of interest to be explored if they appear in conversation (Blake et al., 2021). As Fujii (2017) writes, interviews are useful when exploring how people deal with or wield institutional forms of power. In the case of sport scholarship, interviews are useful for understanding the positions and decision-making processes of governing bodies (Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2009). They allow researchers to engage with the views of senior actors and policy makers within their research area (Phillpots and Grix, 2014). Since this project is concerned with examining the institutional responses to skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, semi-structured interviews were a suitable method since they allowed an exploration of relevant institutional positions and how they are driving change within skateboarding through their principles of governance. In-depth interviews were thus conducted with professionals in the Olympic skateboarding governance network. These interviews are used in Chapter 4.

As well as this, interviews were also used to gain insight into how various grassroots stakeholders are responding and relating to this process. Indeed, semi-structured interviews are also common in projects that focus on situated experiences and actions of individuals. They offer insights into the lived experience of participants, allowing the researcher to act as a detached scientific observer and understand how participants make meaning out of their experiences (Blake et al., 2021). In-depth interviews were thus also conducted with representatives from three grassroots skateboarding NPSOs in the UK, and an owner of a London-based grassroots skateboard brand. This was done to understand how stakeholders at the grassroots are positioning themselves in relation to the Olympic Games. These interviews are used in Chapter 6.

3.2.2: Sampling Strategy and Recruiting Participants

Participants for semi-structured interviews were purposefully identified and then approached via email with a request to participate. This section of the methodology thus used purposeful sampling, whereby the logic of identifying interview candidates is directed by the need to select information-rich cases that one can use to learn a greater deal about the issues surrounding the research aims (Palinkas et al., 2013). Such selection of participants is based on criteria that the researcher identifies as important to the research question. The reason for doing so is to match the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, improving the rigour of results (Campbell et al., 2020). This assumes that specific kinds of people may hold important views about the ideas and issues at question and therefore need to be included in the sample (Robinson, 2014).

An initial selection process was thus completed before interviews commenced. Initially, contact was made with Skateboard GB. They were targeted due to their role in governing Olympic skateboarding in Britain. Since they are responsible for the development of Olympic skateboarding in Britain, they are a key stakeholder relevant to this project. Likewise, a range of skateboarding NPSOs were also identified as information-rich cases due to their role in the development of skateboarding at the grassroots. Lastly, Death Skateboards were identified as an information-rich case study as they are an independent brand with a long history in UK skateboarding. As such, the brand was important in investigating how grassroots skate brands are responding to Olympic skateboarding. Each of these was thus purposefully sampled.

Other subjects were approached during the research process as I learned more about the setting and the actors within it, expanding my conceptualisation of who is important to interview for the project, and as new opportunities opened, such as through introductions from other subjects. I invited Francis of the USA Skateboarding Adaptive Skate Committee for an interview, for example, after we exchanged messages at an online conference. Each potential subject was emailed a request for an interview, along with an outline of what would be covered. Whilst video calls were mainly used, email interviews were offered in the case of time constraints or accessibility needs. There were many individuals that did not reply, however, meaning that some useful data may not have been obtained. When initially approached, participants were asked for an hour of time, however some interviews ran over this whilst others were shorter. A breakdown of interview times is shown below in table 1.

As well as this, the sampling strategy also included elements of snowball sampling. This can be described as seeking information from key informants about details of other information-rich cases. In this strategy, research participants are asked to recommend other contacts that fit the research criteria and may be willing to participate. These can then in turn recommend other potential participants, and so on, capturing an increasing chain of participants in a nonprobable manner (Thompson, 2002). This is useful for capitalising on expert knowledge by identifying and gaining access to other key stakeholders in an institutional network (Patton, 2002). It is also useful for gaining access into 'hard to reach' populations of which CEOs and other individuals that occupy positions at the top of an organisation's employment pyramid can often be (Harvey, 2010). In my case, snowball sampling occurred through an introduction to World Skate members and another Skateboard GB member.

3.2.3: Carrying out the Semi-structured Interviews

Interview questions were formed in relation to the research context and tailored to each individual in order to obtain as much relevant information as possible. As semi-structured interviews were used, the use of a similar topic guide, where relevant, allowed a degree of uniformity to enable comparison across the sample.

Whilst in-person interviews have traditionally been the mainstay of data generation in qualitative research (Ezzy, 2010), UK Government social distancing measures that were introduced during this research made this impossible. Video communication technologies such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams provided researchers with a convenient and effective alternative to in-person however (Oliffe et al., 2021), and all in-depth interviews took place on either of these platforms. These platforms were used since they are likely the two most familiar to the participants, and both have built-in recording features. Indeed, as interviews were conducted after the first wave of the pandemic, participants had experience using this software and were comfortable using the technology at home or elsewhere. Once the invitation to interview was accepted and arranged, participants were sent a direct link to the meeting as well as reminder of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

One of the greatest benefits these platforms bring is the lack of need to meet face-to-face, reducing travel costs in terms of time and money. This meant long distance and cross-country data collection became increasingly feasible (*Ibid.*). This extended the potential reach of recruitment due to the greater flexibility in time and location of data collection that computer-mediated communication offers (Cater, 2011). As such, the research contains interviews with individuals based in a wide range of UK cities as well as overseas. This may not have been possible without the normalisation of video communication technology during this time. Likewise, recording interviews with clarity was easier due to their recording features.

As interviews were conducted online, there were some slight changes in consent form procedure, with these exclusively being emailed to the participant alongside the chance to ask any further questions before giving consent to participate. Forms were completed with a digital or typed signature and emailed back to the researcher. Pseudonyms were used to keep the identity of speakers confidential. Moreover, since the research covers a topic that is controversial for many skateboarders and stakeholders, I do not wish to cause conflict or unnecessarily damage to the reputation of any participants. Whilst participants remain anonymous, the organisations that they work for/within are an important part of that story and context the research, so these have been

included. Moreover, organisational identities would have become clear since there is only one IOC recognised skateboarding IF globally and one national NF per participating country. This was agreed with all participants in consent forms and once more before the beginning of each interview. Nick Orecchio's real name was included, however. This is because his relevance to the thesis lies in how he has worked on and assigned meanings to the brand, and since he is the only employee of the company.

Opportunity to withdraw consent at any stage was given. This was especially important due to the rise of 'Zoom fatigue'. This is caused not only by long periods spent looking at a screen, but also by the intensification of interpersonal interactions due to the condensed spatial dynamics that video calls and conferences offer. For many, this requires additional cognitive effort in interactions and can cause fatigue, exhaustion, feeling overwhelmed and a negative attitude to video calls. Extended periods of looking at the speaker or monitoring non-verbal behaviour are both examples of how these interactions can become more intense (Fauville et al., 2021).

Within interviews, as Hitchings and Latham (2019a) note, building rapport is important in order to facilitate conversation. Some studies have found that using digital platforms such as Zoom has aided rapport building (Jenner and Myers, 2019; Archibald et al., 2019). This may be especially so if they take place in the home, which can create a more comfortable environment that puts participants more at ease. This may reduce the perceived formality and lead to greater naturalness in conversation (Oliffe et al., 2021). Many of the interviews did take place in the homes or home offices of participants and the potential for easier rapport building may be reflected here as conversations ran smoothly and naturally with participants seeming to be comfortable with the situation. However, this is likely also due to my positionality as a white, male skateboarder interviewing others of the same demographic category, or at least other skateboarders. Issues around positionality will be discussed further in the following section. Recordings were kept on a separate hard drive and were destroyed once transcribed. The transcripts were stored on the same hard drive. The following subsection now moves on to a discussion of critiques and issues that arise from this method.

3.2.4: Analysing the Interview Data

In-depth interviews were transcribed and coded. This entails the construction of codes that are fitted to interview outtakes, allowing the ordering of data by type, and creating a more efficient data set (Walliman, 2006). Codes can be described as 'tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study', these tags are then assigned to

extracts related to a specific context (Miles and Huberman 1994: 56). A data-driven approach was used when formulating codes, meaning they emerged from the raw data themselves, rather than a theory-driven approach, in which codes are a priori deductions (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). This was necessary to ensure the development of codes that were best suited to covering all aspects of the data, rather than struggling to fit data to codes. This also meant that analysis followed a grounded theory approach, by which conclusions are drawn up following a systematic analysis of data, rather than from prior theoretical assumptions (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). As such, different codes were generated from different transcripts depending on the context of the interview and its use in the project. Transcripts were coded at what DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2011) call the 'level of meaning'. This involves the coding of extracts at various levels, rather than the sentence or paragraph level, since a single sentence may not have enough information to capture a significant meaning whilst a paragraph may contain several separate themes. This approach is thus a more flexible and efficient method (*Ibid.*).

Interview Number	Participant Name	Interview Length	Background
Interview A	Perry: World Skate	45mins	Skateboarder and skateboarding governance professional with experience in the skateboarding and action sports industry.
Interview B	Lewis: World Skate	1h 15mins	Skateboarder and skateboarding management professional with a background in professional skateboarding photography.
Interview C	David: Skateboard GB	45mins	Skateboarding governance professional with previous experience in management and governance within the traditional sport industry.
Interview D	Lee: Skateboard GB	1h 30mins	Skateboarding management professional with previous experience in skateboard commercial marketing.
Interview E	Francis: USA Adaptive Skate Committee	30mins	Professional adaptive skateboarder. Previous experience within charity based and grassroots advocacy for the practice.
Interview F	Neil: Skate Nottingham	1h 20mins	Grassroots skateboarding charity worker with an academic background.
Interview G	Sam: Skate Southampton	1h	Charity worker and grassroots skateboarding advocate.
Interview H	Maria: Skate Manchester	1h	Grassroots skateboarding charity worker with an academic background.
Interview I	Nick 'Zorlac' Orecchio: Death Skateboards.	1h	Skateboarder and sole owner of 'Death' skateboards, est. 1998.

Table 1: List of interview participants and length of respective interviews.

3.2.5: Critiques and Limitations

Whilst interviews are a popular method throughout the social sciences, they should nevertheless be scrutinised and understood as an event that takes place between two or more people in a particular physical and social context, leading to important social dynamics (Crang, 2003). Indeed, as McDowell (1992: 409) notes, since knowledge is situated, i.e., produced in, and thus shaped by specific circumstances, it is important for academics to 'take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants'.

Many of the fundamental ethical issues in face-to-face interviewing apply also to the digital context (Lobe et al., 2020). In interview spaces for example, it is important to be attentive to potential differences in power and social status (Fujii, 2017). Here, power imbalances and ethical issues can arise since it is the researcher that decides what questions to ask, directs flow of discourse, interprets interview material, and decides where and in what form it is presented (Gilbert, 1994). In the case of interviewing elites of experts in a certain area, these individuals are usually invited to tell a story that the researcher later assembles into an overall narrative, drawing on other sources and theoretical work to do so. This can lead to the downplaying of the interviewee's lived experience, since the interviewee becomes represented according to what the researcher wants from them. As such, it is the case that interviews and quotes taken from them should not be understood solely as marks of authorial authority or true respondent experience but as framed in certain ways for a certain purpose (Hitchings and Latham, 2019a). In this case, interview data is used to illustrate the neoliberalisation of skateboarding as a result of its inclusion into the Olympics, as well as responses to this. A potential critique then is that the Olympic governing organisations are placed within a critical theoretical framework that is loaded with my own subjectivities. However, evidence obtained through the use of a data-driven and grounded theory approach, entailing a close analysis of this system and the actions of the organisations within this, gives credit to my argument.

Moreover, snowball sampling can often create issues of representation. Whilst it is useful to access hidden or hard to reach populations, snowballing can also lead to selection bias due to its dependence on small personal or institutional networks, so those outside of this network become marginalised (Browne, 2005). The sample thus runs the risk of becoming distorted early in the research process, questioning the representativeness of the sample. As well as this, participants may often make their choice of recommendation based upon their perception that the new recruit will be a useful contributor which may not always be the case (Noy, 2008). In the case of interviewing

professional elites, this can lead to a male-dominated list of participants, since white males disproportionally occupy these positions. This holds true for skateboarding (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018; Beal and Ebeling, 2019), and is reflected in this project as all industry professionals interviewed were male. Nevertheless, whilst this sample is skewed in terms of diversity, it is largely representative of those with decision-making power in Olympic skateboarding and so these interviews were necessary in order to understand the institutional motivations and processes within skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics.

Moreover, with reflexivity in mind, it is important to think and be clear about how we are engaging with our interviewee and what that means for how they subsequently speak with us (Hitchings and Latham, 2019a). In my case here, since every interviewee aside from one was also a skateboarder, rapport was easy and quick to build since we had shared linguistic and cultural tropes, meaning interviews flowed comfortably and easily. This is however, bound up in political implications of my own and participants' status as insiders of skateboarding, in which the cisgendered white male is privileged (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). As such, my position here was one of privilege, in that skate cultures shared characteristics are more accessible to myself and most of the interview participants than many others. To combat the bias in interview participants, and account for my own positionality, ethnographic interviews were also undertaken at skateboarding's grassroots, achieving greater diversity in participation, and therefore incorporating a wider range of perspectives and lived experiences of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics. This involved starting conversations with underrepresented skateboarders in the field. I also included an interview with Francis, the chair of the USA Skateboarding Adaptive Skate Committee for the same reason. By doing so, I was able to create a more representative sample and data set across the project.

As for issues regarding specifically online interviews, participants need to meet certain technological and logistical requirements to be able to participate, such as an internet connection, a computer, or another device such as a mobile phone or tablet, working speakers and microphones and a space to avoid disturbances (Lobe et al., 2020). There are also potential security issues with online platforms such as being overheard by others depending on the environment (*Ibid.*). Moreover, an issue that arises uniquely from video research is the potential for each participant to look into one's surrounding environment in real-time, which may be one's workplace or home. Whilst this may not be an issue for some, others may find this invasive and disturbing. For this reason, participants were invited to use a filter or background to use during the interview. Some accepted this whilst others did not. Each

meeting also began with a waiting room, which allows the host to examine each participant that wants to join the session.

Video interviews also blind researchers as to where the participants will be when during the interview since researchers are no longer able to plan or influence where the interview will take place. This can at times mean interviews take place where there are other distractions out of the researcher's control. Researchers thus have to arrive and adapt to where the interviewee is located (Oliffe et al., 2021). One participant for this research, for example, was in a car with their partner and children, to which I was not aware of until the interview began. This meant there were many loud noises and signal drop-outs, meaning I had to at times ask the participant to repeat themselves, creating a more frustrating environment for both parties. This is not a criticism of the participant, but rather that video interviews can be both distracted and invasive.

Likewise, since online interviews may take place in the homes of participants and researchers, they are open to occasional interruptions, such as pausing conversations to check on children, answering the door and others coming into the room including both people and pets. This can impact the flow of conversation and ultimately the coherence of the data. The potential and unscheduled nature of these disturbances require the researcher to be highly attentive to what the participant is saying at all times and be able to get the participant back on track. The following extract from an interview in this project illustrates this:

Participant: Sorry let me just check on the kids one sec.
Researcher: Sure, no worries.
Participant: Kids, you doing alright… Right all good, sorry where were we? Umm…
Researcher: You were explaining about… [cont]

3.3: Analysing the Olympic Skateboarding Events: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

3.3.1: Method Background and Justification

This section explains how the representation of skateboarding at the Olympic Games was explored. To do this, I conducted an analysis of the BBC's broadcast of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding events. The BBC broadcast of the event was chosen as this is the national broadcaster of the Olympic Games in the UK. Broadcasts from other countries were not available due to the need to sign up to subscription services of national broadcasters, requiring a resident address in the respective country.

There were four skateboarding competitions in total, which were split into two disciplines: men and women's street (25th and 26th July), and men and women's park (4th and 5th August). Each event had four heats, or prelims, and one final, all of which occurred on the same day. The first and second heat for men's street was not broadcast, however. The events were initially watched using BBC iPlayer with a group of skateboarders of various sizes depending on availability on that day. This will be returned to later as it forms part of the ethnographic approach to the project. I also screen recorded the events, allowing me to re-visit them multiple times. This method was used to inform Chapter 5.

To analyse the events, Foucauldian discourse analysis was used. Foucauldian discourse analysis seeks to uncover why such understandings dominate certain practices and fields of knowledge. It focuses on how things are said in and outside of texts, highlighting the discourses that define these fields and through what means these have become dominant. It looks at language's use in the broader patterns of human meaning-making, and how this contributes to the constitution of social reality, working to reveal relations of power and political implications therein (see Foucault, 2001). In terms of sport, Foucauldian discourse analysis examines the discourses that structure sport and how these are built into its relations of power, deconstructing accounts of sport to illuminate their broader socio-political context (Liao and Markula, 2009). This method was thus used to show how skateboarding is being neoliberalised through its televised Olympic debut, unpicking the ideological implications within the BBC broadcast, understood here as a communicative event that constructs certain meanings around sport and movement practice.

As Garret (2010) argues, writing about film and video is a key method of geographical analysis since they can serve as an avenue into the consciousness of those that make them. They capture sound, image, movement, time, and space and bound them together as a meaningful form of communication (Jacobs, 2013). As argued in the literature review (Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3), sport media is itself a communicative act (Rothenbuhler, 2009), in which we have seen the dominance of entertainment orientated processes of representation that lead to the production of certain forms of sport. Indeed, as Liao and Markula (2009) write, such practices of communication have transformed the meanings of sport. Organisational and commercial practices of representation designate certain characteristics of sport as more or less important and show them to audiences as such. In this sense, understandings of sport in society are ideologically constructed, employing and maintaining shared cultural meanings to produce sport and guide its understandings and interpretations (*Ibid*.). Following Garret (2010) then, an analysis of the Olympic events allows an insight into the meanings given to sport by those that stage the events.

Since the stories, lives and bodies in sport are such highly constructed phenomena, sport requires a method that seeks to illuminate the ways in which it is constructed in its various forms (Smith and Sparkes, 2005). For many, language and other representational practices provide the central process through which cultural forms are constructed and reproduced (see Hall, 1997), and it is through these processes that sport manifests. As such, Smith and Sparkes (2005) argue that discourse analysis is a useful way of understanding the fields of sport and physical activity, serving to unmask and delineate taken-for-granted, naturalised understandings, instead transforming them into objects for discussion and criticism (Rønholt, 2002). Indeed, as Caldwell et al (2016: 4) argues, 'we describe and analyse language use and its features in the context of sport because this invariably informs us about sport as a communicative activity, as a meaningful social world that constitutes real-world issues'.

3.3.2: Conducting Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

In Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, discourses are identified through an analysis of language and text by use of the two-tiered method of archaeology and genealogy. The former identifies discourses whilst the latter connects these discourses to the operation of power and its cultural and historical context. For Fairclough (2006), discourse is a particular way of conceptualizing language. This definition of language however exceeds written texts or spoken word, extending to include visual images, body language and various semiotic forms. Such an attention to discourse makes its ideological implications explicit, showing how dominance works through text and language (*Ibid.*). In the case of sport media, discourse analysis examines how representations of sport carry ideologically constructed meanings of physical movement (Liao and Markula, 2009). Here then, I adopt an attention to such aspects of the BBC's broadcasting of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding events, making note of the event commentary and how this explains the on-screen action, how the BBC studio host and presenters frame and analyse the event, and how televised sport tropes all work together to create a specific type of sporting discourse. Lastly, I pay attention to the participating skateboarders themselves, such as their statements made through interviews, bodily actions, and interactions with one another to show how they work to offer counter-discourses to the events' overarching competitive narrative.

There are steps involved in undertaking a Foucauldian discourse analysis. To examine exactly how discursive formations accumulated meanings within specific cultural and historical contexts, Foucault adopted what he called 'archaeology'. This conceptualisation of archaeology was articulated first in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972), and can be understood as a tool for revealing the order

of knowledge. It suggests an unstructuring of accepted knowledge. The first step involves the identification of an object for analysis, referring to the specific topics to which the texts refer. In this case, the object is the skateboarding's representation on the Olympic stage. From there, the researcher should locate 'enunciations'; the locations and moments in which the object is discussed. These reveal details regarding the discourses that structure the object. The Tokyo 2020 skateboarding events are thus a key site for discussion of Olympic skateboarding. The following stage requires the examination of the 'concepts' developed during enunciations, which work to form 'individualisable groups of statements', a set of individual but interrelated group of statements that are used to represent and speak about the field at hand. These statements thus produce discourse, they say what things are, or should be. Discourse then goes on to organise speech, thought, knowledge, and behaviour. In the case of the televised skateboarding events, concepts such as competition, rivalry and determination emerged through various techniques of media framing, working to relay a group of statements that produce a specific high-intensity and competitive form of Olympic skateboarding.

The next focus is thus on the 'theoretical formations' that are structured based on the concepts. This level of analysis reveals the links between the individual statements and the discourses that structure the field. It is thus 'concerned with statements that coalesce within specific social contexts' (Markula and Pringle, 2006: 29). In this sense, it shows what the whole communication event is aimed at getting across. In terms of a sporting event, concepts such as success, failure, and meritocracy work to create an overall theoretical formation around sport that reinforces neoliberal logic as a natural aspect of sporting activity. It is this stage that highlights how the concepts and statements within sport work to structure it as a shared field of knowledge with specific meanings.

So far, this analysis uncovers the discourses at play, yet it says little about the effects these have on social practice and power relations. As such, the final objective of Foucauldian discourse analysis is to understand the practices, that are produced through discourse and the power relations that this leads to. This is where the genealogical element of discourse analysis comes in, linking discourses to the wider social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are situated, such as the policies and ideologies that govern discourse, and in turn revealing the relations of power therein. Indeed, Foucault's (1978) genealogical approach requires researchers to 'locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates' (Foucault, 1978: 11). Central to genealogy then is showing how power is exercised and sustained through the use of disciplinary discourses and associated routines of normalisation (Kearins and Hooper, 2002). It emphasises how certain social formations are related to and co-constitutive a wider social and cultural structures. A full analysis thus

requires examination of the social context in which texts are found. This allows us to build a history of struggles and make use of this in tactful ways to inform alternatives (Foucault, 1978). To this end, genealogy is a descriptive enterprise, aimed towards the construction of intelligible trajectories of discourses and practices (Dean, 1992). It is this connection that makes discourse analysis a useful method for studying social phenomena (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). This is where discourse analysis differs from other methods such as content analysis, which examines the defined categories of the story as it manifests in separate sections of the narratives told. Instead, discourse analysis works to link these narratives and formations to wider social and political contexts.

As argued throughout Section 2.2 in the literature review, sport and representations of sport are not politically neutral. Instead, they are driven by profit-driven logics of commercialisation and spectacularisation, leading to a neoliberal model of sport that reinforces the hegemony of competition and meritocracy in sport and everyday life. An athlete's identity, for example, is therefore formed within the nexus of power relations and discourses that structure sport as a field of knowledge. It is important to remember, as Pink (2012) argues, that it is not the media itself that is wielding power here but the practitioners of media that instead hold the potential for production of discourse. In the case of this project then, this step manifests in the situating of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding events within the larger context of neoliberal sport, whereby through skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games, the practice is becoming transformed into one that further represents neoliberal logic, minimising the possibility for imagining alternative ways of life. As such, I use this method to argue that Olympic skateboarding has become a tool of governmentality, a process in which the production and reproduction of discourse is central. Since this method was undertaken following in-depth interviews, there were already some preconceptions around the themes that would be present during the broadcasts, such as the presence of judging and ranking systems. It is in this way that the epistemological elements of multi-method approaches come into play then, whereby different methods and analyses that are conducted in the same project may influence one another. Whilst it is arguable that methods should not influence one another as to do so would create biased data (McKendrick, 2020), I argue in return that this is the very strength of this project, showing how each of these objects of analysis tells a larger, interrelated story about skateboarding's neoliberalisation.

3.3.3: Critiques and Limitations

One potential critique of discourse analysis is that it can lead to a loss of attention on the everyday lived experiences of people, with the potential to lead to broad claims of social change and

dominance within a community that their data may not support (Smith and Sparkes, 2005). One way to navigate this is through an attention to people's everyday understandings as displayed in ordinary conversation and the concern with how conversational participants perform various kinds of discursive actions (McGannon and Mauws, 2000). This is true also in sports. Caldwell (2020), for example, uses an interpersonal discourse analysis of on-field tracking texts and shows how players construct notions of solidarity and power with each other through language. This highlights how participants of sporting events can exert power of their own, and struggle to create counter-discourses. Indeed, as Foucault writes, all of those involved in using language participate in the circulation and creation of this discourse and knowledge.

As such, during analysis of the skateboarding events, attention was not paid only to how the event was framed by the media producers, but also to interviews conducted with participants during broadcasts and the gestures and actions they made throughout. Indeed, discourse is not simply enacted through written text or spoken word. Rather, it can be produced through visual images, body languages and more that work as concepts and statements to build on overall theoretical formation. Through such an attention to the participating skateboarders then, the production of counter-discourses can be revealed, with skateboarders showing their own motivations and characteristics that in many instances oppose their original competitive framing. It is through this analysis that the theme of resilience is illustrated in Chapter 5, showing how despite their appearance at the Olympic Games, the participants consistently displayed the characteristics of skate culture that make skateboarding a resilient cultural practice and an example of alternative ways of understanding and practising physical movement.

3.4: Policy and Discourse Analysis

3.4.1: Method Background and Justification

As well as using Foucauldian discourse analysis to assess the skateboarding events, it was also used to examine the policies and actions of both World Skate and Skateboard GB as to show how World Skate and Skateboard GB are assigning specific meanings to skateboarding through their governance of its inclusion into the Games. This portion of research informed Chapter 4. In this case, this required using some techniques from critical policy analysis, making a combined approach. Critical policy analysis is a process of inquiry aimed at the assessment of policy-relevant information. In part, this was the first stage of the research process for this project, taking place prior to in-depth interviews, discourse analysis and ethnography. It thus informed potential interview questions for the

participating governing bodies, allowing contextually specific questions to be asked and certain policies and viewpoints elaborated upon. This is another way in which the approach to this research was an integrated one.

Indeed, it has long been noted that a key strength of critical policy analysis is its focus on policy discourse (Dryzek, 1987). As outlined to in Section 2.2, sport policy became increasingly relevant from the second half of the 19th century onwards as governing bodies began to be formed and sport practice was further commercialised and standardised. Today, policy is a key area that sport managers work on. Policy broadly refers to a set of actions designed to address an issue or achieve specific outcomes. In sport, the term is used to refer to decisions made by national governments, international governmental organisations, and sport federations, i.e., those that have influence to over the sport in question (Sport and Dev, *nd*). Policy issues that managers are typically concerned with are governance, taxation, international relations, athlete eligibility, drug testing, gender equality, athlete eligibility and team selection and programs for accessibility, although this is not a definitive list and commitments to each vary depending on the organisation (Chalip, 1996). Policy thus shapes the growth and development of sport and how it is experienced in the contemporary world (Houlihan et al., 2009). Since it is within policy that techniques of managing sport lie, they are thus key sites for examining discourse within institutionalised sport. As Dowling and Washington (2021) show, social constructions of sport and its meanings direct policy in certain paths, giving rise to emergent policies that are situated within dominant understandings of sport. Expanding on this, Jedlicka (2018) argues that governance frameworks of sport are thus constructed in line with the ideological elements of their producers, structuring them in specific ways that in turn create dominant understandings of sport throughout society.

A critical policy analysis considers the ideologies that permeate sport policy and governance, and tackles issues such as how and what kind of power relations are exercised through policy, in whose interest policies operate, and to what end (Piggin et al., 2009). Policy is thus seen as a rationalisation of its maker's political interests, and an analysis of this policy can thus show how the interests of policy makers are articulated through their policies (Houlihan, 2005). Critical policy analysis thus focuses on institutional practices, scrutinising the procedures or techniques that contribute to dominant ways of understanding and doing sport (Piggin et al., 2009: 464). In many cases, and as with this thesis, critical policy analysis is combined with discourse analysis (Dowling, 2020; Whigham and Bairner, 2018). This allows researchers to uncover dominant discourses that structure the way that sport managers create policy and govern sport. Açikgöz et al. (2019), for example, used discourse

analysis to show how sport policy in Turkey is embedded within neoliberal ideology, giving depoliticised notions of employment, economic participation, and self-action as solutions to overcome social exclusion in youth. It thus challenges the underlying assumptions made in sport policy, allowing a conception of how those in power understand sport and desire to shape their practice.

3.4.2: Conducting Policy Discourse Analysis

In line with the analysis of the BBC broadcast of skateboarding's Olympic debut, I use a Foucauldian discourse analysis here to likewise assess the various statements made by both World Skate and Skateboard GB. This includes an analysis of their official documents, news posts, their actions, and interviews with staff from these organisations. Following Section 3.3.2's outline of the steps involved in a Foucauldian discourse analysis, the objects of analysis are thus the governmental policies of World Skate and Skateboard GB. From there, the enunciations are their policy documents, news posts and so on, which reveal the details of the discourses that structure the object. Whilst some of the information drawn upon is not official policy documents, they are still moments in which policy is explained, revealing the sporting discourses that inform them. In a Foucauldian sense, they are thus the locations and moments in which the object is discussed, qualifying them as 'enunciations'. Indeed, scholars of sport policy such as Hong (2012) and Piggin et al. (2009) blend their analysis of policy documents with other online or physically available news materials to qualitatively understand sport policy's purpose. Moreover, Hong (2012) uses interviews to supplement these written documents to further understand policy decisions and the logic and assumptions that underpin the actions of elite sport managers. Whigham and Bairner (2018) extend this further, including secondary data in the form of interviews, speech transcripts, and press releases

From the enunciations, concepts are then identified, representing the meanings that are given to the objects within the enunciation. They thus show the meanings World Skate and Skateboard GB are giving to skateboarding through the governance of the practice. Finally, the theoretical formations are the end product of this, referring to the constitution of Olympic skateboarding as structured through these concepts. In line with theories of governmentality, this constitution then goes on to become a field of shared knowledge in society. Ultimately then, this mix of policy and discourse analysis works to show how the practice of skateboarding is made into a competitive sport through the policies of the institutions involved in this process, or in other words how they serve to constitute a specific discourse around skateboarding as a sport.

3.4.3: Critiques and Limitations

Critical policy analysis relies on interpretation of policy-relevant elements whereby the researcher shows what those meanings are, who is making them, how and why they are being communicated, and the political implications of this (Yanow, 2007). As such, this method sits within wider debates on interpretive research methods more generally, whereby the positionality of the researcher relative to the objects being studied must be acknowledged. As such, policy analysis should also include the researcher taking into account how they themselves are involved in the meaning-making process, influenced by their own lived experience and subjectivities which may lead the researcher to interpret the data in a contextually specific way. Realising such, the researcher must refute claims to objectivity, which is highly questionable in any research on political discourse due to the undoubted subjectivity of the researcher (Berling and Beuger, 2013).

In line with this thinking then, I realise that the reality of the texts analysed here, and indeed throughout this entire thesis, is partial, contingent, and potentially shifting (Fairclough, 2003). Although this does not mean such work is 'bad science'. It is still the case that critical social science provides the tools that allow texts to be seen in relation to elaborated general theories, allowing a nuanced understanding of the complex discourse under scrutiny. Indeed, taking such an approach allows the development of innovative methodologies which effectively align with and address the research question at hand (Berling and Beuger, 2013). To this end, critical discourse analysis thus encourages the infusion of personal political values into the research process (Fairclough, 2003). Since if we ask questions that arise from particular motivations, claims of objectivity can be refuted in favour of constructing a scientific understanding that attempts not to define truth, but to give a complex and contextualised insight into human possibility and experience. Interpretivist qualitative research such as this project embraces the subjectivity that is frowned upon in the positive paradigm by adopting a reflexive approach, thus allowing the identification of the subjective biases that shape one's interpretation of a specific subject, given the constructed nature of knowledge claims (Yanow, 2007).

3.5: Researching Everyday Skateboarding: Ethnography

3.5.1: Method Background and Justification

Finally, to capture everyday skateboarders' relations to the Olympic Games, an ethnographic approach was adopted. Traditionally, ethnography is characterised by the observation of people's everyday lives for an extended period of time (Hammersley, 2006). It is an embedded form of

qualitative research in which the researcher spends time within the field of interest to collect in-depth data, observing and interacting with a certain social group (Ghoddousi and Page, 2020). For Pink (2007), this allows the researcher to experience, interpret, and represent cultures and social groups, in turn revealing the processes and meanings that sustain and motivate social groups. In this sense, ethnography allows an exploration of lived experience, revealing how social phenomena play out within certain groups and how they make sense of the world around them. It involves coming into contact with the everyday lives and cultures of the research subjects, subsequently allowing observations of, and interactions with others to see how bodies interact, meld, and constitute social spaces (Herbert, 2000). Indeed, it is within the spaces of skateboarding that its norms and values are produced and reproduced through repeated practice and interaction with one another. Adopting an ethnographic approach thus allowed me to critically examine these spaces.

As Hitchings and Latham (2019b) note, ethnographic approaches have long been a popular choice for human geographers that are interested in how social life unfolds in particular places and contexts. This is especially true in cultural geography, to which ethnography presents a way to interrogate events, practices, atmospheres, feelings, and the structures of everyday life against which relations unfold in a range of spatial and temporal contexts (Vannini, 2015). Whilst geographical investigations of sport are yet to fully take off as a popular area of research, some geographers have turned to ethnography to better understand this topic. Spinney (2006), for example uses ethnography with racing and touring cyclists in both the UK and France to explore the rhythms and kinaesthetic sensations of movement, showing how cyclists experience and give meaning to places through their embodied awareness of their environment. Following the theme of cycling, Larsen (2016) gives an ethnographic account of practices of long-distance commuting by bike, and how cycling connects with wider cultural meanings, technologies, and the built environment, in turn highlighting how these practices are performed within wider social words. In the context of organised sport events, Koch (2017) uses ethnography to show how national identity is constructed and challenged by athletes, spectators, and urban residents during the 2016 UCI Road Cycling World Championships. Realising the potential of ethnography then, Wise (2017: 220-221) argues that geographers can productively use ethnography to provide 'a unique insight into how sport impacts people's everyday lives and becomes implicated in localised power relations'.

It is my contention then that ethnography is thus a well-placed technique for furthering the relevance or sport to critical cultural geographies of sport that seek to understand how physical movement is bound up within wider power relations. The ethnographic portion of the thesis thus

aims to build upon this scholarship, seeking to understand what meanings grassroots skateboarders give to their practice, how its inclusion into the Olympics affects their understandings of skateboarding, and how it is practiced in this emerging context. With the lenses of neoliberalism and resilience in mind then, ethnography is used to further the relevance of sport to cultural geographers (see Section 1.4), showing how the accounts and practices of everyday skateboarders are bound up within wider relations of power.

Specifically, 'insider research' was the approach adopted here. This can be understood as a scenario in which the researcher is already a part of the group of social circumstances that they are researching (Butz and Besio, 2009). I thus have the relevant 'cultural competence' within the skate community, that is, an awareness of the distinctive norms, values, and systems within that is required to spend time in these spaces, and to communicate effectively with others (Hodkinson, 2005). Indeed, as Roseneil (1993: 189) writes, 'there are many social situations which would be inaccessible to an outside researcher'.

The benefits of this approach are multiple. Firstly, insider research allows ease of access to the researched community (Butz and Besio, 2009). This is reflected here since I am familiar with the location of skateboarding sites. Without this knowledge, it would have been more difficult to locate a useful site for the research. Moreover, having the relevant cultural competencies meant that I was not preoccupied with attempting to perform in an unfamiliar way and so I was able to turn my attention to the gathering of data (Hodkinson, 2005), as well as having an ability to make better sense of the data that was gathered (Butz and Besio, 2009). Finally, as Hodkinson (2002) notes, those seeking to immerse themselves in subcultural social situations as outsiders may raise more barriers than they reduce due to hostility towards those seeking to adopt elements of the subculture in inappropriate and insincere ways. I was thus able to avoid such issues. Combining my insider status with an autoethnographically approach then, provided a rich methodology for the research interests at hand. Insiders are often likely to share a range of experiences with other participants, as such, this data can be thought of as general of most practitioners (Roseneil, 1993).

As Garret (2010) writes, there is not necessarily a template for how work should take place in ethnographic methods. Instead, it should be shaped by the research needs at hand. As such, an ethnographic orientation calls for a variety of methodological tools such as participant observation, interviews, auto-ethnographies, netnographies, various forms of media collection and more (Ghoddousi and Page, 2020). For this project, ethnography was carried out in my local skate scene

based in Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, and the surrounding areas, including Waltham Abbey, Croxley Green, Potters Bar, and Harlow, all of which are suburban towns with purpose built skateparks and their own skate communities. Many of the skateboarders within these communities know and are friendly with those from other towns, constituting part of a larger community. The ethnography involved simply turning up to skateparks and spots, sometimes alone or with other skateboarders. Whilst I was living in this area, the research also included occasional trips to London, which is not as connected to our local scene, but still has a thriving skate culture throughout the city. During 2021, I relocated to south-east London, and from this point Folkestone Gardens in Deptford became my new local skatepark. At these sites, I took part in the practice, had conversations with other skateboarders and recorded my own reflections. In other words, I emersed myself in the skateboarding community in these sites. Visits to these various sites were not always specifically planned far in advance, but emerged more spontaneously and in the short term as individual or group decisions were made to travel to different skateparks and skate spots at certain times. The specific methods used in this ethnographic approach were interviews and autoethnography.

Due to the range of methods that can be used in ethnography, and the various possibilities of items to analyse, it often gives rise to large amounts of data that is unstructured according to pre-established analytic categories (Herbert, 2000). Instead, the research outcomes are often co-produced with the research, allowing for social phenomena to reveal themselves through fieldwork, rather than entering the field with rigid categories that may leave to a reductive understanding. This is not to say that there was no conceptual apparatus, but that there were no predetermined hypotheses laid out prior to beginning the research. This is important since meaning is often revealed through practices, reactions, comments and bodily composures and it is an attention to these that allows researchers to understand the larger cultural system of which it is part (Jackson, 1989). As Herbert (2000) writes, events and objects are perceived by human agents in line with the cultural and spatial contexts in which these events and agents are positioned within. As such, due to its emphasis on social context, ethnography should focus on such the emergent, meaning that the researcher should fully engage with research subjects before reflecting on the observations in line with theoretical concepts (Scholl et al., 2014).

During the research then, I aimed to understand how, in real-time, grassroots skateboarding relates to this process of inclusion and the complexities involved. To do so, I adopted a data-driven approach, through which themes were identified within the date following the conducting of ethnography. It was through this focus on emergence that the themes of resilience and enjoyment (Sections 2.3.4 and

2.3.5) were encountered. These will be elaborated on in Chapters 5 and 6. After encountering the resilience of the skateboarding community, this then influenced how I thought about the media framing of the Olympic events, prompting a re-analysis as to look for expressions of resilience made by the events' participants. This turns again to the interrelated nature of multi-method research. Nevertheless, despite a commitment to emergence, there were some preconceptions involved in the formation of the research aims, such as understanding the Olympic Games as a product of neoliberal sport, and skateboarding's inclusion into the Games as an opportunity for further neoliberal entrenchment into the practice. This is also informed by my own positionality as a skateboarder and researcher of cultural neoliberalisation.

3.5.2: Ethnographic Interviews

In this thesis, I draw on ethnographic interview notes that include conversations with other skateboarders as well as more spontaneous conversations and my own reflections written as autoethnographic notes. The interviews were conducted differently to those outlined in Section 3.2. They were unplanned, conducted with everyday skateboarders and were more informal and conversational in their format. They thus resembled more what Stage and Mattson (2003) have called 'contextualised conversations'. They still follow classic interview tropes such as specifically designed and purposeful questions, but were less structured, taking the form of more casual conversations and were at times with multiple participants. This was done as to unobtrusively engage participants in their natural settings and routines, favouring more natural behaviour and spontaneous social situations (Finlay and Bowman, 2017). These interviews were analysed using the same coding method explained in Section 3.2.4.

Indeed, spatial context is important in interviews, since it can meditate and frame conversation in certain ways (Elwood and Martin, 2000). The interview site can, for example, be a positive force in the construction of identities of participants during the interview. Individuals may choose, whether consciously or otherwise, to present certain aspects of their identities in particular spatial contexts (Sin, 2003). Since the sites of skateboarding practice are ones in which the norms and values of skate culture are played out through performance and interaction (Section 2.3.1), it makes intuitive sense to talk about skateboarding with skateboarders in these sites, and so all ethnographic interviews took place in as skateboarding was taking place. By being immersed in a group of skateboarders, this method allowed an insight into how skateboarders discuss things such as the Olympics on their own terms, providing an opportunity to see how these conversations form and take place. This portion of the ethnographic fieldwork was thus driven by a desire to understand how everyday skateboarders

themselves are responding to the Olympics, and how they feel that the Olympics does, or does not, fit into their practice. In line with the discussion of resilience in Section 2.3.6 and 2.3.7, it sought to uncover any perceptions of and commitments towards skate culture, thereby furthering our understanding of how skateboarders perceive their own practice and how external forms of organised sport relate to this. Moreover, as Lombard (2010) shows, in many instances of commercialisation, skateboarders are often willing to concede parts of their culture to trade for better conditions and remuneration. This portion of the fieldwork thus also aims to test Lombard's (2010) argument through an investigation of what positive aspects might the Games bring to skateboarding, and if skateboarders are willing to accept this.

In line with this, participants were firstly asked more general questions such as what they thought about skateboarding being included into the Olympics, whether the Olympics fits within skateboarding and vice versa, if they felt that there were any positive or negative aspects of skateboarding's inclusion, and how skateboarders should approach the Olympics. Similarly to the in-depth interviews (Section 3.2), conversations were flexible with follow-up questions being asked in response to the participant's responses.

These Interviews were not recorded through audio, but were written up into notes following the encounter. This was done to allow for a greater naturalness to the conversation and maintain its spontaneity. Interviews also took place in the spaces of skateboarding, namely at skateparks and skate spots.

Key benefits of my insider status here were the relaxed interview situations, in which all participants aside from one were skateboarders. Indeed, this shared status as skaters that comes with it meant that rapport could be built easily through the use of shared cultural and linguistic tendencies and knowledge such as slang, skate-specific terminology and a shared, embodied understanding of skateboarding more generally. This meant that I was able to facilitate discussion in a more relatable way for participants, leading to more natural and lively discussions. This holds true for the in-depth interviews as well.

3.5.3: Autoethnography

Autoethnography combines principles of both autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). As a method, it entails description and analysis of personal experience in order to understand wider socio-cultural phenomena (Ellis, 2004: Reed-Danahay, 1997). A good autoethnographic account then,

is one that is not simply a confessional narrative, but a weaving of a story and the wider theory in which it sits (Behar, 1997). The types of autoethnography have been divided by Butz and Besio (2009) into personal experience narrative, indigenous ethnography, reflexive ethnographies, and insider member research. In all styles however, authors scrutinise and reflexively rework their own understandings as a way to shape understandings of the wider world.

My account runs from December 2020 – May 2022 in which I detail my experiences of skateboarding during this period, at times with friends and other times alone. Within my accounts, I also discuss comments and remarks made by other skateboarders, and more general conversations. As to weave this story into a theoretical theme, accounts were written up into autoethnographic notes that were later picked apart, interpreted, and used to show how a community of skateboarders, including myself, is relating to the practice's Olympic Sport status. This required a reflexive approach, treating myself and the community I am part of as objects of signification (Butz and Besio, 2009). The autoethnographic portion of this project's fieldwork was thus driven by the need to understand if the practice of skateboarders was changing in response to skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, and if so, then how. During the period of these accounts, attention was paid to my own experiences of skateboarding within a community of skateboarders during the period leading up to and after the Tokyo 2020 Games. This included how I, and at times others that I was skating with, were thinking about and performing our practice, the atmospheres I experienced whilst skateboarding, the conversations that I with others during skateboarding, and occasionally of my thoughts, feelings and reflections during my period of recovery when I was unable to skate due to injury. These were then written up as diary entries following skate sessions or during moments of reflection. This then allowed an insight into whether the neoliberal logics of the Olympic Games were affecting our practice, thereby generating an insight into how grassroots skateboarding responds to and deals with the dissemination of neoliberalised sporting discourses. In my accounts then, I found themes of neoliberalism embedded in my own and others' actions and dispositions. It is also through this analysis that the theme of resilience was uncovered. Upon reflection on this data, it was clear that skateboarders and skate culture are in many instances resilient to this process of neoliberalisation. The theme of resilience then went on to inform the analysis in both Chapters 5 and 6.

3.5.4: Critiques and Issues

An intrinsic issue with ethnographic data is firstly gaining access to the community that one wishes to study. This could be due to being an outsider to the target community, creating obstacles to access such as wariness and lack of trust. In this sense, access may require dress that is familiar to the setting

in question, as well as demeanour, speech and habits that fit (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The fact that ethnographic research depends on such access however, and on building up relations of rapport and trust with people in the field, whilst using this to generate data for the researcher's own purpose, raises issues of positionality, especially so when conducting insider research. It is thus important to realise my position here in terms of my 'insider status' (Bennet, 2002) as a skateboarder of some 14 years.

As mentioned, skate culture comes into being through an ensemble of meanings, actions, rituals, aesthetics and strategies that shape a style perceived as authentic by practitioners, and set it apart from other cultures and scenes (Schwier, 2019). As Abulhawa (2020) writes, skateboarding is a culture that is built around movement. As such, signs are set with the body, its actions, and the spaces in which these take place, working to create a shared stock of knowledge and certain lifestyles. As such, when integrating into skate culture, or wanting 'to lead a skateboarder's life', one must go through a learning process which includes competent negotiation of scene-typical rituals, clothing, and special forms of dealing with pain and injury (Schwier, 2019). Likewise, as previous research has shown, the codes that build an authentic skateboarder have been primarily circulated by men in skateboarding's core industry, and are thus illustrative of the internal power dynamics within skateboarding (Atencio et al., 2009). Throughout most of skateboarding's history, these notions of authenticity have been embodied by risk-taking, creative, and mostly white cis-gendered males, conflating gender and authenticity, and serving to marginalise other groups of people, especially women, trans or queer identifying people (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). This thus means that the ease of entering the skate community and sites of skateboarding for research purposes was a product of privilege. In order to account for this, I ensured that my ethnographic interviews engaged with diverse participants as to engage with as many viewpoints as possible and create a less biased data set. Due to these power relations within the spaces of skateboarding, there may also be pressures to behave in relation to a particular socio-spatial construction of identity. This data must thus be understood as situated and contextually specific.

Moreover, ethnography insists on the importance of coming to understand the perspectives of the people being studied. At the same time however, there is an equal emphasis on developing an analytic understanding of these perspectives (Hammersley, 2006). An issue thus arises in the need to interpret ethnographic data in that it relies on the subjective orientations of the researcher (Hitchings and Latham, 2020). This can lead to generalisations or conflicts which how people understand themselves and the world (Hammersley, 2006). As such, insider research may have the potential to

limit of the researcher's ability to develop insights that go beyond the taken for granted (DeLyser, 2001). Moreover, there is an emotional aspect in doing insider research, especially so if researching something that has been crucial to the researcher's own identity (*Ibid*.). Here, this manifests in the issue of being a long-time skateboarder, that, combined with my researcher status, formed a dual positionality that required a level of critical distance from the culture (Bennet, 2002). A successful approach to this research thus necessitated that I step back and fully assess the circumstances of the situation in question (Kitchin and Tate, 2000).

This dual positionality also meant that I gave greater exposure of the Olympics to the skateboarding community that I was part of. I watched the Games, for example, with skateboarders that I was familiar with, and often prompted discussions about it when skating with them (see Section 6.6.3). In this way then, I guided many of the conversations that were had during this period by asking them to join me in watching the Games, a situation created by my desire to research the topic. Indeed, one specifically mentioned that they would likely not have watched them had this not been the case. Moreover, as the later discussion in Section 6.6.1 will show, my own skateboarding habits were affected by elements of the research and data that I gathered, which in turn prompted others that I was skating with to change their performance in a similar manner. Indeed, this may not have happened should I have not been a researching this topic. Nevertheless, the data does still exemplify how discourses of contemporary sport can run through and alter practices at the grassroots. The data obtained through the ethnographic parts of the fieldwork was largely part of a wider process through which many of the participants were increasingly exposed to and learned more about Olympic skateboarding, itself a result of my own positionality as a skateboarder and researcher. This is true for some but not all participants, since many participants during the ethnographic interviews were also one-off chance encounters.

This project thus uses a range of qualitative methods, each with their own benefits and implications. Each of these were used to suitably address the research needs in each case. This is the benefit of adopting a mixed-method approach since it provides a toolkit to examine issues that cross multiple scales and levels of analysis. From here then, the analytical section of the thesis begins, showing how these methods were put into practice and the findings that they generated.

4: Producing Neoliberal Sport: The Role of World Skate and Skateboard GB in Governing Olympic Skateboarding (16,274)

4.1: Introduction

As mentioned in Section 1.3, in August 2016, the IOC agreed to the addition of karate, sport climbing, baseball, surfing, and skateboarding into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. For the OCOG Tokyo 2020, these sports were representative of, and therefore more relevant to, the global youth audiences that the IOC are currently attempting to capture (Tokyo 2020, 2015). The entry of a new sport into the Games is a complex and bureaucratic process, however, since the sport must undergo some large-scale structural changes in terms of its governance. This includes the need for an IOC-recognised IF and NF, and internationally standardised competition and qualification systems that pave athletes' road towards participation in the Olympics. As well as this, all parties must then follow and endorse the obligatory processes and values of the OM (Batuev and Robinson, 2017). Through the Olympic Charter then, power runs throughout the OM from the IOC to the international and national levels, working to neoliberalise sporting practices. Figure 6 provides a representation of this on the following page.

This first analytical chapter thus looks at the developments in the governance of skateboarding that have occurred and are continuing to occur as a result of skateboarding's debut inclusion into the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Programme. In line with geographical work that characterises neoliberalism as a process, it shows the transformations happening within the governance of Olympic skateboarding that neoliberalise the practice. It then argues, through a Foucauldian approach, that it is at this site of actually existing neoliberalism at which the discourses and norms of neoliberalism become circulated more widely. This chapter thus shows how skateboarding is becoming construed as an object of neoliberal governmentality by becoming integrated into the OM, casting Olympic skateboarding as a tool for reinforcing the hegemony of neoliberalism in sport and everyday life. This is to the detriment of skateboarding's oft-cited potential to offer alternatives to such a form of sport, as well as to provide critiques of neoliberal society more generally (Wheaton, 2004; Borden, 2019; Cantin-Brault, 2019).
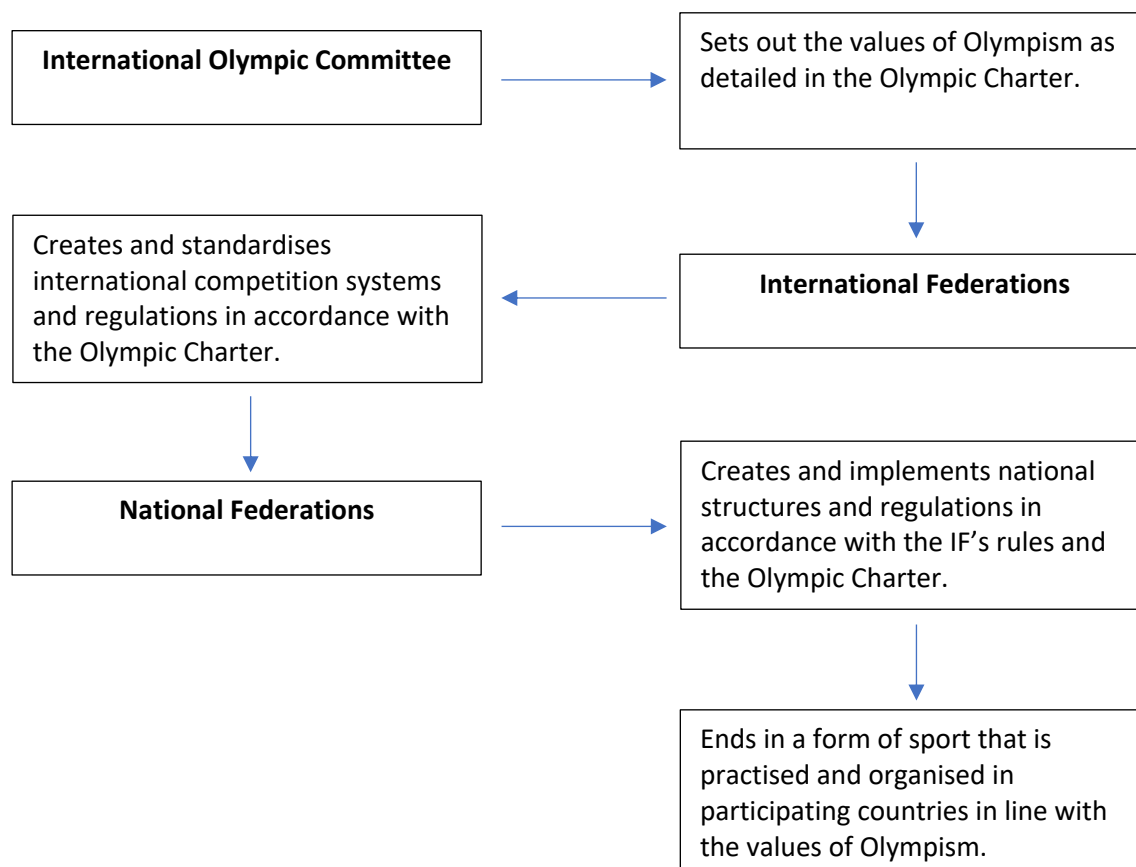
Figure 6: The hierarchy of Olympic Sport Governance (author's own)

This analysis chapter appears first since it charts the initial policies and processes that must occur for skateboarding to appear at the Olympic Games, marking the first step of neoliberal governmentality as it is occurring through skateboarding's inclusion. By covering this ground, the chapter shows how these organisations are working in line with the guidelines of the IOC, OM, and Olympic Charter, to produce the sport of Olympic skateboarding as a fixed and marketable thing, ultimately designating it as a specific field of knowledge. It thereby highlights the meanings and conceptualisations that these organisations are giving to Olympic skateboarding through the use of discourse. In line with Batuev and Robinson (2017; 2019) however, I will also argue that action sports governance is not a blanket process in which all sports are governed through the same methods and techniques, but one that requires careful attention to the respective cultures embedded within such sporting practises. This in turn evidences the way neoliberalism manifests in contextual, nuanced, and hybridized forms (Springer, 2010). This attention is important in the case of skateboarding since its practitioners have long been wary of external governance and commercialisation (Lombard, 2010), protesting strongly against skateboarding's inclusion in the London 2012 Olympics for example, as well as its debut inclusion into the Tokyo 2020 Games sparking an ongoing conversation within

skateboarding as to the practice's identity going forward (Schwier and Kilberth, 2019). As such, I look at how these governing organisations make use of the characteristics of skate culture within their governance of skateboarding as attempts to maintain cultural legitimacy within skateboarding and its associated culture, hoping to maintain their relevance and appeal to skateboarders (Batuev and Robinson, 2017). Finally, and in addition to these critiques, I bring attention to the benefits that are occurring within skateboarding in response to its integration into such an institutional framework.

Compositionally, the chapter is split into five analytical sections:

- Sections 4.2 and 4.4 use the combined policy analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis approach outlined in the methodology (see Section 3.4) to assess the various statements made by World Skate and Skateboard GB online through an analysis of the content of their websites, official policy documents, an in-depth interview with a member of Skateboard GB, and the governmental actions that they have completed in order to include skateboarding in the Games. Following a Foucauldian discourse analysis then, the 'object of analysis', referring to the specific topics to which the identified texts discuss, is the governmental processes of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics. From there, the 'enunciations', the sites where this is discussed, are the various documents, regulations, and actions of the governing bodies. These enunciations are then examined to reveal the 'concepts' and 'statements' developed through discussion that then form the entire 'theoretical formation', which define the field in question as a site of specific knowledge.

- Sections 4.3 and 4.5 make use of the in-depth interviews, analysed through traditional coding (see Section 3.2). It draws on four interviews with Olympic skateboarding government officials from Skateboard GB and World Skate. These are used to examine the positions of the individuals within the organisation, their understandings of Olympic skateboarding, and how this understanding affects how they deal with and wield such institutional forms of power. By doing so, it shows how these organisations are working to legitimise their presence within skateboarding.

- Finally, Section 4.6 shows the benefits that skateboarding's inclusion into the Games is having on diversity and accessibility within the practice through a continued use of policy analysis and an in-depth interview with a member of the USA Adaptive Skate Committee.

4.2: World Skate: Turning Skateboarding into a Competitive Olympic Sport

The IOC-recognised IF for skateboarding is World Skate, which can be described an 'umbrella' IF since it governs more than one sport (Batuev and Robinson, 2019). This includes 12 'roller sports', listed on their homepage as skateboarding, speed skating, artistic skating, inline alpine, inline downhill, inline freestyle, inline hocket, rink hockey, roller derby, roller freestyle, scooter, and skate cross (World Skate, *nd*). Skateboarding is the only of these that is an Olympic sport. World Skate was formed in 2017 by merging the ISF and the FIRS after much difficulty in deciding which organisation would govern skateboarding at the Olympic level, a process which I have explained in Section 2.3.3. In this section, I draw on a critical policy analysis approach to critique World Skate's policy documents and various communications they have published in the run-up to the Olympics. Combining this with Foucauldian discourse analysis by characterising skateboarding's Olympic governance as the object of analysis, and World Skate's outputs as the enunciations, I thus show how World Skate's governance and representation of Olympic skateboarding designates it as a specific field of knowledge, neoliberalising our understanding of the practice and constituting it as an object of governmentality.

4.2.1: Creating an International Qualification System

As for skateboarding's initial inclusion into the Games, the IOC first require an international governing body. From there, the next required step is the creation of a competitive framework for the sport. This process began not long after World Skate's formation, with the IF announcing in 2017 that the qualification system will be based on their newly created Olympic World Skateboarding Ranking (OWSR) system, with each athlete competing for Olympic qualification points in World Skate sanctioned events between 1st January 2019 - 30th June 2020 (World Skate, 2017). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic however, the remainder of the qualification period was suspended on 26th March 2020. The second qualification season was then rescheduled for 1st January 2021 - 29th June 2021 (World Skate, 2020). There are five types of sanctioned events in this system, each with a specified maximum OWSR point total that determines how many are awarded to top scoring athletes (World Skate, *nd*). The five categories are world championships, pro tour events, 5-star events, continental championships, and national championships. These are in descending order of their OWSR point worth, with first place in a world championship being worth 80,000 points, whilst first place in a national championship rewards 3,330 points (World Skate, 2019).

The differing point values for each event are important since they award the highest number of points to those skaters that are able to successfully compete at the international level, which will have

the largest pool of contestants. On the other hand, the national championships reward the least points of the five categories since this is the smallest pool of competitors. In other words, the best skateboarders at the international level are rewarded the most points due to their supreme ability to overcome all others whilst at the national level, participants must overcome a smaller selection of skateboarders from their respective home nation. As mentioned in Section 1.2, the structures of modern sport provide a metaphor for lived experience under neoliberalism (Whannel, 2008). Under neoliberalism, it is the most competitively successful individuals that are rewarded (Boykoff, 2011). In this sense, competitive success supposedly shows that the value of the successful individual is higher than those that are unsuccessful (Brown, 2018). The five categories of events and their corresponding OWSR point value take this literally, creating a situation in which the most competitive individuals are most greatly rewarded. This system thus presents meritocracy as a taken-for-granted part of sports, naturalising the ubiquity of competition within it as well as showcasing the benefits of success.

Overall, there were 80 places for skateboarders to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Games, with 40 each for both the male and female categories, and 20 skaters in both the street and park competitions within each category. Generally, then, it was the highest scoring skaters that qualified for the Games. The OWSR system was not the only way to qualify, however. Firstly, the top three highest place skaters at the 2021 World Championships in Rome automatically qualified for the Tokyo Games. As well as this, as Japan were the host nation, they were assured representation in each event for their highest-ranking skateboarder, even if they did not make the top 20 in any category. Moreover, each remaining nation was only allowed three representatives. Once these three spots were taken, the next place was allocated to a nation that was yet to fill their quota. Lastly, if no one from a specific continent managed to qualify through OWSR points then a place would have been reserved for that continent's highest representative. The aim behind this was to have all continents represented in each competition, in this case Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Oceania (World Skate, 2019). Dallas Oberholtzer, Mellisa Williams, Boipel Awuah and Brandon Valjalo qualified in this way for South Africa, for example. Whilst the introduction of these qualification routes minimises some of the competitive edge imposed by the OWSR ranking system, each route towards qualification is still dependent on the skaters being the most competitive in that particular circumstance. In other words, they were the most competitive in each category, and then went on to perform in a larger competitive circuit.

Understanding the creation of this internationally standardised qualification system as an enunciation, the concepts introduced into Olympic skateboarding can be examined. Through the need for participants to qualify, ultimately battling against one another, concepts appear such as 'success', 'failure', and 'rivalry'. In addition, the point system creates concepts such as 'elite participation' and 'performance-based rewards'. In this sense then, these concepts work together to build a set of statements that make a specific mode of discourse around skateboarding, saying that skateboarding it as a competitively inclined event based on meritocracy. This marks the practice's neoliberalisation.

4.2.2: Creating a Standardised Judging System

To create a competitive framework and internationally standardised ranking system such as the above, there must be a standardised judging system that can distinguish 'good' skateboarding from 'bad' skateboarding, measure one's performance, and generate winners and losers. Indeed, as World Skate (2018: *np*) note, 'amongst the many responsibilities of World Skate as Tokyo 2020 approaches, one of the most important is standardizing the process and criteria of how skateboarding contests are judged'. As part of an ongoing project then, World Skate set up a series of online webinars, open freely to anyone but aimed mainly at federation managers, team managers, coaches, and other professionals in the Olympic skateboarding world to ensure that they have the required knowledge of skateboarding and can manage it appropriately. The first of these webinars was the 'Understanding Skateboard Judging' webinar held on 17th March 2021. As explained in the webinar, World Skate see the purpose of skateboarding judging as a tool to rank athletes fairly. As such, and as the speakers noted here, the judging system is formed in line with the needs of the competition environment, and therefore in line with the rules of fair play, in which all participants are treated equally and have the same opportunities (Vamplew, 2007). Each skater gains an overall total score by the end of the competition, formed of averages of their individual runs. This is then used to compare all the participants' performances within that specific competition, generating the winners and losers and thus deciding how many OWSR points are awarded to each skateboarder. Taking the creation of the judging criteria as an enunciation then, World Skate are working the concept of 'equality of opportunity' into skateboarding through the use of judging to facilitate fair play and equal opportunity, an assumed characteristic of neoliberal life.

In order to create this official judging criteria and system, the World Skate International Judging Program (WSIJP) was launched in December 2017. This was overseen by the International Skateboarding Judging Commission (ISJC), a diverse group of NFs and skateboard judging experts. The judging criteria set by the ISJC are shown in figure 7. Due to the need to distinguish success from

failure in a competition, a numerical analysis of each participant is required. All of their actions must therefore be quantifiable and measurable (Davies, 2017). To this end, the judging criteria are based on who can perform the most difficult tricks, how well these are executed, and the variety of tricks, with higher scores being awarded if multiple tricks are landed without failing.

The standards upheld by the ISJC are thus based on how well the skateboarders can perform in a quantifiable sense. The skateboarders are then awarded a single competitiveness score, separating the most competitively successful from those who are not. Similar to the OWSR then, these scores work to separate individuals from one another, rewarding those who are most competitive. To this end, standardised exchange values are required, flattening out any qualitative difference in the process of their dissemination (Mould, 2021). Hence, performance is split into categories that can be measured and quantified to assess ability, introducing the concept of 'quantification of performance'. In the case of sports that have a judging system (as opposed to running, for example, where winning is about finishing first rather than a calculated measure of one's performance), this marker is a score; a predetermined and numerical indicator of performance that serves to rank all competing individuals against one another. For skateboarding at the Olympic Games, the scores range from 0-10 in the street discipline and 0-100 in the park discipline.

More than simply quantifying performance however, the ISJC was also created, in World Skate's (2018: *np*) words, to 'foster the continual progression of skateboarding' by 'standardising the process and criteria of how skateboarding contests are judged'. As World Skate (2018: *np*) furthers, 'quality and consistent judging are the basis of fair competition and ensure that skaters around the world know what's expected of them as they begin the qualification process for the Olympic Games'. On the other hand, they note, 'Poor judging […] can actually cripple the progression of a sport'. Since the ISJC's goal is to foster the development of skateboarding through high standards of judging, judging and ranking skateboarders subsequently become conflated with the progression of skateboarding as a sport.

For World Skate and the ISJC, the criteria shown in figure 7 are thus the foundation for good judging and progression, and poor judging (i.e., judging that does not evaluate the difficultly, etc.) of a participants' tricks, would inhibit the development of the sport. Whilst this is true in a very narrow sense, since it does serve to push the boundaries of skateboarding on a technical level, asking athletes to do the best tricks in the most skilful and consistent way possible, this neoliberalises our understanding of progression. It does so because such a system assumes that progression can be

achieved only through a framework of competitive individuals, working to push themselves and overcome one another. As such, through the belief that pushing the limits of individual performance can create universal benefit, the ISJC are building a concept around 'the power of the individual', which is understood to foster the progression of the sport. Indeed, as mentioned in Section 2.1.3, early Chicago School neoliberals such as Ronald Coase (1988) argued that through the unrestricted competition of businesses and individuals, these actors are able (and forced) to constantly strategise towards their own development goals, meaning they will make the most efficient and beneficial decisions for themselves, ultimately driving the development of society. The ISJC's method for the development of skateboarding mirrors this. It assumes that creating a competitive judging system and pitting skateboarders against one another is the most effective method for achieving universal development within skateboarding. As participants are pushed by this system to obtain the best score possible then, these scores come to mark the progression of skateboarding as a competitive sport, equating development with a codified measure of individual success.
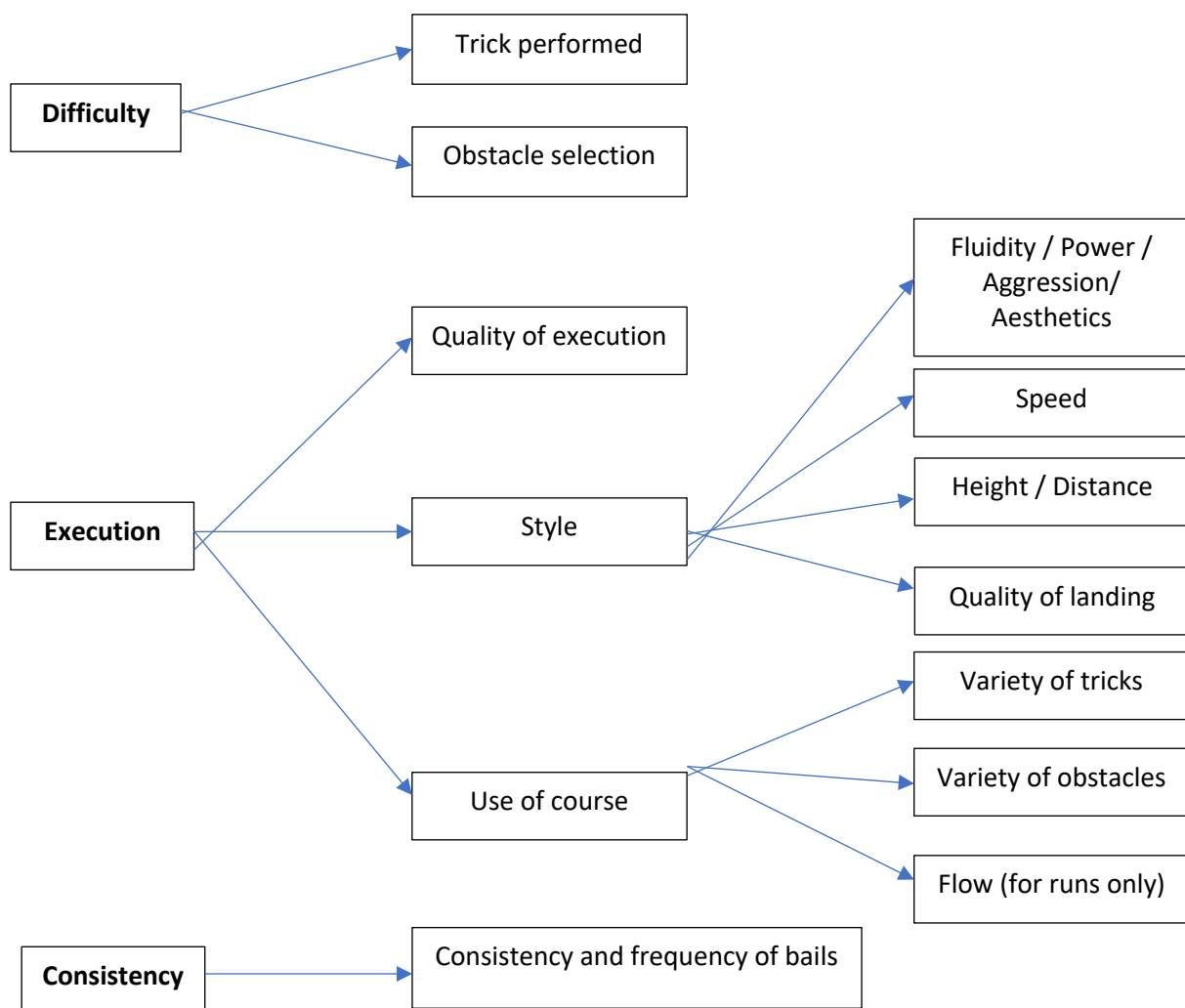
Figure 7: ISJC skateboarding judging criteria. Author's own, adapted from World Skate (2018).

As Vamplew (2007: 845) argues, 'rules emerge because of competition', and it is therefore this type of tightly regulated judging and ranking rules created by World Skate that distinguish improvised play from sophisticated games of sport. This subsequently turns the activity into a quantifiable sport that can be recognised and spread throughout the world in a standardised way. As Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbot (2008) write, IFs have contributed significantly to the standardisation of sport in this way. Indeed, as presenter Martin Karaz noted in the Skateboard Judging Seminar, World Skate need a judging system that could be used at all competitions around the world to ensure equality of opportunity. Importantly, these rules and regulations are produced and rendered fit for a specific purpose, in turn reflecting the social visions of the rule-makers (Jedlicka, 2018). Since the emergence of competition in sport is rooted in neoliberalism, these introduce neoliberalised social relations and conceptions of performance into skateboarding practice, creating concepts within Olympic skateboarding that serve to create statements that present it as a specific field of knowledge with a set of pre-defined practices. Through the discourse this creates, skateboarding becomes an Olympic sport, removed from its origin as a form of playful practice (Cantin-Brault, 2019). Hence, whilst the above outline of World Skate's newly established qualification and judging systems may seem fairly obvious and normal for a sport at this level, they are important as they mark skateboarding's real-time transformation into an Olympic sport through the introduction of neoliberalised sporting concepts.

Presenting skateboarding as such a theoretical formation serves to normalise these neoliberally inclined systems throughout sport and in society, shaping skateboarding into an object of governmentality that works to disseminate market-based discourses throughout society. Whilst it contributes to the hegemony of such discourses within society, it also serves to flatten out skateboarding's more qualitative and unmeasurable characteristics. Its cultural and lifestyle driven facets of community, cooperation, and creativity are swapped out in favour of a system based on measurable characteristics of difficulty, execution, and consistency. Through the ISJC judging framework and the OWSR point system then, skateboarding is being deliberately neoliberalised. These are policies and systems that serve to create a form of sport based upon neoliberal understandings of society, erasing collectives in favour of competitive individuals. All actions are quantified, reorganising social relations in line with market values that pertain to individual ability and reducing understandings of development to quantifiable measures of individual success (Mould, 2021).

As mentioned in Section 2.3.3, Batuev and Robinson (2017; 2019) argue that due to rich cultures and practices associated with the origins of action sports such as skateboarding, principles of their governance must be formed with a close attention to these specificities, working within the boundaries of these activities' socially constructed norms, values, beliefs, and definitions in order to increase their relevance and legitimacy. As many have written, skateboarding relies heavily on social capital and sub-cultural 'cool' (Snyder, 2017; Beal and Ebeling, 2019). This is true for individual skateboarders, but also for corporations wishing to enter the skateboard industry. Indeed, commercial actors within skateboarding are bound by its cultural codes (O'Connor, 2020). Skateboarders are often wary of those coming in from the outside of skateboarding and so commercial actors wishing to break into the industry must be seen by practitioners to maintain the values of skateboarding, and work to benefit skateboarding in some way (Lombard, 2010). In line with this, and through their framing of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic programme, World Skate consistently demonstrate an understanding of skateboarding culture and often directly refer to its norms and values. This section explores this, showing how despite the production of neoliberally inclined discourses, World Skate stills seeks to situate itself in relation to skateboarding and skate culture to gain legitimacy within skateboarding, working with the practice's subjective orientations and worldviews that are often understood to pose alternatives to the neoliberal system of sport.

4.3.1: World Skate's Values of Skateboarding

As Perry (interview A) sets out, '*there are core values of skateboarding and approaches that I believe define the sport we practice*', the main feature of which they define as '*expression*'. They also make idiomatic references to skateboarding's lifestyle-driven qualities, such as '*how skateboarders go to school and then go skating in the afternoon wearing the same clothes*'. It is characteristics such as these that mean that skateboarding is '*embedded in everyday life*' and is involved in everything from how '*you perceive coaching to how you design cities and sports areas, and how you approach the practice of sports'.* In this sense, for Perry, skateboarding is a part of human software itself, working as a shared mode of understanding the world and everyday life (O'Connor, 2020). These points are made by Perry (interview A) to illustrate that they believe there is something inherently unique about skateboarding, and that it presents an alternative way of understanding sporting practice.

Building on this, Perry (interview A) maintains that skateboarding is a DIY cultural practice that has a variety of rich subjective meanings and associations for its practitioners. Importantly, as they

(interview A) note, '*the really beautiful thing about skateboarding is that it has been built spontaneously by those who skate*'. This refers to skateboarding's strong DIY attachments, showing that these lifestyle-driven values are inherently skater-owned and created (Lombard, 2010). Perry understands this DIY ethos as something that affords variance and diversity within skateboarding. They (interview A) mention, for example, that the subjective attachments that skateboarders bring to skateboarding are a historical phenomenon, and that attachments, perceptions, and interpretations can alter over time and between individuals: '*I've been skating myself for about 32 years* […] *what skateboarding represents to me is not the same as what is represents to people that skate at my local skatepark*'. Lewis, (interview B), also a skateboarder, further exemplifies this understanding of skateboarding. They made frequent mention of skateboarding's creative and DIY ethos', as well as the way that '*it constantly changes and evolves*'.

Together then, these remarks show that World Skate is aware of skateboarding's traditional ethos' and cultures and are well equipped to use these in conversations about skateboarding. Indeed, whilst skateboarding is said by practitioners and academics to have embedded values of community and connection, it is also a practice that celebrates diversity and difference, whether that be fashion, skating styles, demographics, and interpretations of the meaning of skateboarding in general. For this reason, skateboarding has been described as a diverse community that is constantly in flux (Willing et al., 2019).

4.3.2: Using These Values within the Governance of Skateboarding

For Lewis (interview B), skateboarding is '*so much more than the act and the tricks*' and so '*trying to be true to what we* [World Skate] *know skateboarding to be even on that institutional level is really important to us*'. The values that World Skate have for skateboarding thus filter directly into how they govern the sport. As Perry (interview A) remarks, for example, '*skateboarding is so different to me than to someone that started skating 5 years ago so it's impossible for me to think that my perception should work for them as well*'. The most important part in World Skate's governance of the sport is therefore '*understanding from skateboarders' point of view what the Olympic sport environment is like, how it works, and what opportunities can be exploited*' (Perry, interview A). This shows a recognition of the need to understand how skateboarders perceive the Olympics, and then see what opportunities can be taken from the Games in such a way that aligns with skate culture. This idea was furthered by Lewis, (interview B), who stated that skateboarding is not theirs alone to represent. As they (interview B) mentioned, '*skateboarding will always be what it already is to me, and now it's for the people doing it and I see that it's my role to honour that. It's their thing and it's about telling their*

stories{…} and so for me it's important to bring in all these different voices and aspects that don't just come from an old white dude professional California dream skateboarder'. As for World Skate's role in the representation and governance of skateboarding then: '*a lot of it is about letting skateboarders shape their own path*' with World Skate working '*to clear the way*' (Lewis, interview B).

World Skate's motive then, is not to assign its own meanings to skateboarding and use these as principles of governance, but instead to listen to skateboarders, with the IF working to open a space for skateboarders to control the development of skateboarding and make space for greater diversity within the sport. World Skate are thus attempting to work visibly in line with skate culture. As explained by Lewis (interview B), '*if you follow the lead of the people that are skateboarders now and you have their back, you're fine*'. This all aligns with the argument that skateboarders prioritise their own control over skateboarding and its developments (Lombard, 2010). World Skate clearly have an awareness of this, and are using their knowledge strategically to do what is perceived as right by skateboarders and thus to ensure their legitimacy within the skateboarding scene.

Moreover, there is a clear understanding that skateboarders are weary of their practice's inclusion into the Games and the commercialisation and subsequent misrepresentation that comes with it. As a result, skateboarding is the only of World Skate's sports to have a specifically appointed manager. As Perry (interview A) explains, this is because World Skate want '*to have a skateboard specific voice for skateboarding as presenting our world to the rest of the world should be done from a skateboarder's perspective*'. This comes from Perry's (interview A) standpoint that to '*be successful in the Olympic world and for it to be an integrated part of skateboarding, you must have skateboarders involved in that process*'. This would then ensure that '*Olympic skateboarding represents skateboarding in the best way possible*'. The use of 'integrated' here by Perry explicitly shows World Skate's desire to legitimise themselves within the skateboarding community.

World Skate's values of skateboarding also play into how they collaborate with other organisations within the Olympic skateboarding network. For example, the IF '*need that those required to make decisions for the sport have a knowledge of it*' (Perry, interview A). It is for this reason that World Skate launched the aforementioned webinar series aimed at making this knowledge more easily accessible (see Section 4.3.2), or in Perry's (interview A) words, '*to pass on the particularities of skateboarding and how to better understand and operate within the skateboarding scene*'. In the same way that World Skate need to have a strong knowledge about the subjective nuances of skateboarding then, they also require the other organisations that they work with to have the same

knowledge to ensure their actions are suitable for skateboarding and that the IF's presence within skateboarding is further legitimised. All of this is underlined by the fact that '*the skateboarding community is gradually understanding that Olympic skateboarding is not something that has a life of its own, but it's made of the people that are participating in the structuring of it*' (Perry, interview A). This final comment shows that World Skate are very aware that they are the ones with decision-making power over the management, development, and representation of skateboarding, and that they must ensure that through their decisions and actions that they are able to legitimise their governance of skateboarding.

There is thus a clear recognition at World Skate that skateboarding is not just a physical activity, but a culture and lifestyle, the meaning and value of which are defined by its practitioners rather than some external force. As such, there is also a recognition of the importance of working in line with skate culture, and representing skateboarding in a way that comes from skateboarding itself in order to smoothly and effectively integrate the Olympics into skate culture. At the same time, there are some important remarks about not only representing skateboarding as it appears from the traditional white male perspective, but from the perspective of younger and more diverse participants. As Lewis (interview B) mentioned however, this last part was difficult in the run-up to Tokyo due to the short time frame in which skateboarding's inclusion into the Games needed to be organised at the institutional level. The need to rapidly create a governance structure to fit the Olympics meant that World Skate had to draw heavily on the pre-established skate industry, which has a history of privileging white male practitioners over those with other demographic characteristics (Beal and Ebeling, 2019).

4.3.3: A Subversive Future for Olympic Skateboarding?

These efforts for legitimisation and acceptance from wider skateboarding culture can also be said to be a result of World Skates proposed mission that is '*to allow skateboarding to have an impact on organised sport, which is the main goal and the best result that we could get out of skateboarding*' (Perry, interview A). Indeed, for Perry (interview A), '*there's a blueprint in organised sports that needs to move towards sports as more integrated in everyday life of sports people and this is something that skateboarding really represents*'. This closely mirrors skateboarding's anti-institutional and resistive ethos, with commentators noting that skateboarding poses alternative ways of understanding sport and everyday life under neoliberalism (Cantin-Brault, 2019). Moreover, it shows World Skate wish to encapsulate this in their role and to push back at the confines of contemporary sport frameworks, doing so in an authentic way through skateboarding lifestyle and culture-driven characteristics.

Likewise, as Lewis (interview B) mentions in regard to skateboarding's subversive potential, their hopes for World Skate and the Olympics are that skateboarding will be able '*to breathe a bit of life into everything. I think you do that by being skateboarders and not trying to fit into this box*'. In this sense, World Skate recognise skateboarding's potential as a resistive practice, understanding that it sits outside the 'box' of traditional Olympic sports and therefore presenting an alternative to them. They hope that by approaching skateboarding in this way, World Skate can '*continue to encourage that creative environment and not lock skateboarding in one place*' (Lewis, interview B).

However, the real subversive potential and willingness of World Skate is doubtable. As Perry (interview A) noted for example, regarding the testing of their recognised skateboarding NFs' abilities, that '*at the end of the day, its proven in the records that if you do it right, you are producing good skateboarders and you are producing good results. If you are not, you are not gunna get results in the competitions. And that's the best way to actually assess quality*'. So, despite stated commitments to further the development of skateboarding through an attention to its embodied cultures, competition results are still seen as the most accurate representation of the quality of skateboarding governance in a given country. This is furthered later on, when Perry (interview A) mentions that '*Those who* [NFs] *are doing the right job are already supporting and working with young talents that are 12 years old right now, and might be 16/17 by the time Paris* [Summer 2024 Olympics] *is there, and if they are doing it right, they will be doing good in Paris, otherwise the talents that are getting older are not performing as good as they were two, three years ago, will be lost and no new talents will be there*'.

So, in this case, an NF having good training programmes and the ability to identify successful skateboarders, at such a young age especially, is a reflection of proper governance. The important point here is that good governance is directly correlated with producing talented skateboarder athletes. This is thus not only submitting to but also actively reinforcing the Olympic ethos of competitive and elite participation to the point where producing a strong competitive team is built into World Skate's understanding of skateboarding governance. Whilst World Skate's attention to skateboarding culture, its values, norms, knowledges, and their wishes to use these in an authentic way, the IF abide to a system that works to construct sport through neoliberal discourses, ultimately reinforcing the presence of neoliberalism within society. Indeed, as Perry (interview A) notes, '*the first thing that an NF needs to do is organise a national competition scene, we can talk about core values of skateboarding, self-expression and everything else, but at the end of the day, the whole Olympic system is set up in a way that, you compete, you win, so that is the bottom line of it*'. In this sense, whilst issues of cultural legitimacy appear to relinquish some power back to skateboarders in terms of

Olympic skateboarding's organisational framework, the values and requirements of the OM are the primary arrangements that World Skate follow. The international governance of skateboarding thus involves dialogue and compromise between skateboarding's traditional values and the values of the OM (Batuev and Robinson, 2017).

4.4: Skateboard GB: Curating a National Competitive System for Skateboarding

Since World Skate is the IOC recognised IF for Olympic level skateboarding, it must comply with the regulations of the OM and so is governed in a way that resembles the logic of the Olympic Games and competitive sport under neoliberalism more generally. Likewise, NFs, which are a member of their sport's respective IF, must comply with the regulations set out by said IF. As per World Skate's (2019b: 6) statutes for example, member federations must comply with the following: 'contribute to achieving the goals of World Skate', 'comply with the decisions adopted by the bodies of World Skate' and 'participate in World and Continental Championships to the utmost of its capacities and possibilities or at least once every three years'. Following the IF's need to abide by the bylaws and regulations of the IOC and the Olympic Charter, skateboarding NFs are by necessity also bound to the competitive ethos of Olympic sport, and so are responsible for formally imbuing a competitive ethos into the sport. It is through this hierarchy of governance that the practice of Olympic skateboarding becomes defined, with each actor working to produce specific discourses around skateboarding at their respective scale, as required by the Charter. This section thus unpicks the workings of the skateboarding NF Skateboard GB, formerly Skateboard England, which was formed officially on 18th September 2015. It uses policy discourse analysis to assess the types of practices that Skateboard GB are creating, including Skateboard GB's news posts, official documents, and an interview with Lee (interview D).

4.4.1: Creating an Olympic Level National Competitive Framework

As per Skateboard GB's (2015: 2) 'rules and by-laws', their first objective is to 'act as the governing body for Skateboarding in England and Wales', whilst their second is to 'carry out the functions delegated to it by the International Federation and other relevant bodies'. This comes before their third objective which is to 'promote, administer and encourage the development of, and participation in skateboarding within England'. Working in line with World Skate is thus one of the main objectives of the NF. As part of the Olympic system, World Skate requires NFs to run national championships, and there is a finite number of these that an NF can miss before World Skate consider moving on to another organization to act as NF. For World Skate, the Olympic system demands that these

competitive championships are of primary importance, despite skate culture's general anti-competitive and community-centred ethos.

So, on the national level, the Olympic system first requires the formation of a structure in which competition is the underlining feature. In this sense, grassroots skateboarding is formally placed as a second to competitive participation through the IOC's pedestaling of competitive sport. This manifests at the national level in Skateboard GB as neoliberalised policies of sport in which competitive participation takes precedence over skateboarding's community values. Whilst Skateboard GB does have a clear commitment to grassroots skateboarding that I will show here, the organisation is nevertheless tied to the Olympic system. The news posts on their website, for example, almost invariably mention how the Olympics will inspire a new generation of skateboarders and how the NF wishes to use its newly obtained Olympic status to provide leverage for the sport, further reinforcing neoliberalised discourses of sport.

To integrate into the Olympic system then, and again referring to Skateboard GB's (2015) rules and by-laws, the NF have an objective 'to develop a competition programme and co-ordinate competition fixtures across England & Wales' and to implement strategies for performance measurement and enhancement at both international and national competition levels. So, the NF are creating a national competitive championship system and seeking skaters that are willing and able to compete. Fittingly, and as a direct response to the Olympics' requirements to have a specific qualification route for British skaters, Skateboard GB created the National Skateboarding Championships, the first group of which were held in two parts, corresponding to the Olympic street and park disciplines, in April 2018 with Truro's Mount Hawk Skatepark hosting the street championships on the 14th and 15th and Hemel Hempstead's XC hosting the park championships on the 28th and 29th (Skateboard GB, 2017). From there, they were held in Manchester's Graystone Skatepark in 2019, where they were due to be held again in March 2020 but cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 issue, before taking place again at Graystone in April 2021. The 2021 edition of the National Championships were a World Skate sanctioned Olympic qualifying event, and so the three top-ranked skateboarders from each event were awarded OWSR points as well as prize money. The 2022 National Championships were not a World Skate sanctioned event since the qualification period for the Paris 2024 Games had not yet begun, meaning no OWSR points were awarded.

These competitions take place in purpose-built skate parks and use the same format as other World Skate sanctioned events as well as the Olympic Games, involving street events with a 'runs' and 'best

trick' section, and a park event consisting of just a runs section. Likewise, they are judged in the same way with the same amount of points that can be awarded for each section. These events thus take place in a specific and carefully curated and controlled time and space that is organised by prescriptive rules that control eligibility, behaviours, and ultimately the choosing of winners and losers (Vamplew, 2007). This system thus works to build on an already established commercialised and regulated version of skateboarding, working to further the reach of neoliberal sport, rather than presenting skateboarding as something that can offer alternatives to this framework. In this sense, the policies outlined by the OM in the Olympic Charter, such as working to establish rules and practices in sport in accordance with the 'Olympic spirit' manifest at the national level through a combination of international (World Skate) and national governance (Skateboard GB) policies to create these spaces of neoliberal sport. Skateboard GB are thus introducing neoliberalised understandings of sport at the national level. By curating a national competition structure in which Olympic hopefuls must compete, the NF serve to make the concept of 'competition' a more salient part of skateboarding in Britain. Since they are then required to adopt the same judging systems as World Skate, this again introduces the same concepts as mentioned in Section 4.3.1, such as 'quantification of performance', 'performance-based rewards', 'success', and 'failure', all serving to transform skateboarding into a neoliberalised version of the practice by stating that skateboarding is characterised by these elements.

4.4.2: Creating Olympic Athletes for Tokyo 2020

As well as creating a national competition structure, the NF also has an objective to help skateboarders take part in the Olympic qualification system, selecting and coaching skateboarders and proposing them to the British Olympic Association to then become part of Team GB, the team that represent the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories at the Olympic Games, or indeed Europe in the case that no United Kingdom athletes were to qualify. To meet this need, on 14th March 2019, Skateboard GB (2019a) announced that the organisation would receive part of UK Sport's newly created Aspiration Fund award, which would help allow Skateboard GB to help certain skateboarders qualify for the Games. The £3 million fund was created by the UK Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and UK Sport for 14 Olympic and Paralympic sports, including skateboarding, surfing, and softball, each making their debut at Tokyo 2020, as well as others such as wheelchair rugby, beach volleyball, and table tennis. The funding aims 'to support sports who do not currently receive full UK Sport funding to develop plans to help teams and athletes realise ambitions for the Tokyo Games'. Skateboarding was granted £166,825 of the total (UK Sport, 2018: *np*).

Skateboard GB then selected a team of five skateboarders, namely Sky Brown, Alex Decunha, Sam Beckett, Jordan Thackeray, and Alex Hallford. These five received funding to support their travel and entry costs into World Skate sanctioned Olympic qualifier events across the world (Skateboard GB, 2019a). In Skateboard GB's (2019b: *np*) words, the five skaters were chosen 'on the basis of their previous performance at international events, their current performance in 2019 and their potential to gain the qualification points for Tokyo'. As well as supporting the five skaters' qualification costs, the fund also allowed Skateboard GB to hire Darren Pearcy as Team Manager in the same year, who's main role 'is to plan and implement the smooth and effective delivery of the UK Sport Aspiration Fund award, through supporting Skateboard GB team activities and to ensure that skateboarders have the best opportunity of qualifying for the 2020 Olympic Games' (Skateboard GB, 2019a: *np*).

On the topic of the selection of the five skateboarders, Lee (interview D) mentioned that they *'were selected based on competition history and the feeling of being able to compete at the highest level in skateboarding. Sam had done the X Games and won the gold medal, Alex and Jordan travelled to pretty much every competition in Europe and had varying results, DeCuhna had travelled all over Europe and the world to varying events, and had a bit of involvement in Street League'.* The four male skaters were thus chosen since they have all had previous successful competition experience, and so would be familiar with and able to perform well in the Olympic system. Competition results were not taken into account for Sky Brown's selection, as she was only 10 at the time, so wasn't regularly participating in competitions. Nevertheless, she was chosen due to her incredible talent and has progressed to the point where '*she's got crazy like, eye of the tiger in competition, just to be able to focus in moments and how she deals with competition anxiety and stress in that environment is just insane when you're that young*' (Lee, interview D). Despite lack of competition results then, Brown was praised for her ability to display good athletic characteristics in the traditional sense of having determination, focus, mental resilience, and desire to win. Skateboard GB are thus Introducing publicly funded schemes to push athlete performance, with specific staff to ensure that this is achieved. In this way, the NF are introducing the concept of 'performance maximisation' into Olympic skateboarding, pushing a type of skateboarding in which one's ability must be stretched as far as possible in order to succeed. Since the skateboarders chosen to receive this were chosen based on criteria of excellent performance and ability to compete successfully, this also reifies skateboarding as a practice in which 'elite participation' is a key element.

In the run-up to the Team GB skateboarder's first appearance at the delayed Tokyo 2020 Games, a formalised progression pathway for training the athletes was yet to be finalised. Despite this,

Skateboard GB's five funded skateboarders did receive training from their team manager. Whilst this was perhaps not as scientific as the extent of other more high-profile Olympic sports, and, at the time of writing, there is no specific purpose-built training facility, it does show the onset of a sportified training system that aligns with the Olympics' emphasis on competitive sport. The team's training was, for example, data-driven to a large extent. As Lee (interview D) mentions, all of the skater's competition appearances were recorded, and so '*say it's your run, we record your 15 tricks you do in your run, we record if they're grinds, flips, slides. We'll categorise them, identify the amount of obstacles within a bowl or street course and then from there create percentages around course coverage, so for example if you look at a bowl and say there's 20 different types of obstacle in there, let's make sure you're covering at least 50% of those obstacles in your run and we can start feeding that information back*'.

This shows the emergence of a more quantified and measurable approach to training in skateboarding then, with performances being recorded in relation to the Olympics' skateboarding judging systems. It allows Skateboard GB to give data-based feedback to the team of skateboarders in attempt to ensure they maximise their potential during their competition performances as much as possible. On one level, this perpetuates a competitive ethos then through the celebration of elite performance and attempts at its maximisation, both necessities under the competitive structures of neoliberal sport. On another, it marks the rationalisation of skateboarding at the Olympic level whereby the actions of the athletes, i.e., the skateboarding that happens on the field of play, becomes quantified in line with pre-established assessment criteria of judgment and ranking, serving as rational limits and reducing skateboarding's potential as an artistic practice (Cantin-Brault, 2019). This thus returns to the concepts of 'quantification of performance' and 'performance maximisation', along with 'strategisation'. As mentioned, neoliberalism is a process of the assigning of value to everything, thus marking all action measurable in an economic sense (Brown, 2015). For this reason, individuals must plan strategically in order to maximise their potential (Boykoff, 2011). Through the creation of a training method as outlined here, this neoliberal logic is applied to skateboarding, working to rationalise, measure, and strategically maximise the performance of the athletes to achieve an external benefit in the form of points.

It is important to note however that during the period in the run-up to the 2020 Games, Lee (interview D) also mentioned that '*there's no national training facility, there's no programme, there's none of those things, so it would feel irresponsible to kind of start having huge like expectations of those people*'. So, since the programme was still in the early stages, meaning there was no set

progression pathway or fully rationalised training plan, Skateboard GB attempted to not place excessive pressure on the skateboarders to achieve results. As Skateboard GB (interview D) summed up '*we're all new, and to have crazy ideas around what we can achieve in such a small space of time would just be insane... nobody is on the phone down our neck everyday saying, right these guys have gotta qualify what are you doing?*'. Whilst this period saw the initial stages of an elite training pathway emerging, this was yet to result in high expectations for the athletes, meaning the roll of the Olympics' competitive ethos was weakened to some extent. This was mainly due to the uncertainty of skateboarding making a second appearance at the Paris 2024 Games. As explained in the following section though, Skateboard GB's national training programme has seen some important developments, since it is now a permanent Olympic sport, showing an intensification of skateboarding's neoliberalisation at this level.

4.4.3: Paris 2024 and Onwards

   Since skateboarding has now become an Olympic sport, this has 'cementing the need to identify and nurture the incredible talent there is in the UK' (Skateboard GB, 2021d: *np*). As a result, in April 2021 Skateboard GB announced the appointment of high-profile female skateboarder Lucy Adams as 'Progression Project Lead'. Adam's role is to work 'with the skateboarding community to create the structures and environments needed for talented skateboarders to thrive and reach their potential in a way that complements the culture of skateboarding'. Whilst the delayed Tokyo 2020 Games took place shortly after Adam's appointment, the talent pathway associated with her role was not launched until October 2021, one month after the Games had finished and in time to prepare for the Paris 2024 Olympic cycle (Skateboard GB, 2021f). The progression pathway, known as the 'Pipeline Pilot Project', was made possible through UK Sport's Progression Investment stream, one of three investment streams which are aimed at supporting athletes, 'targeted to maximise their chance of medal success and enable us to drive positive social change' (UK Sport, 2022; *np*). The pathway is thus driven by the neoliberal logic that top-down investment and individual success lead to societal prosperity (Mould, 2021). Skateboarding was awarded £1,672,485 of a £10,307,780 total distributed across 8 sports (UK Sport, 2020). This is the highest amount received by any of the other sports aside from fencing, which was granted the same.

   The Pipeline Pilot Project, led by Lucy Adams, is based in four trial skateparks in England, namely BaySixty6 in London, Graystone Action Sports in Manchester, Flo Skatepark in Nottingham, and Mount Hawke in Truro. These have been selected with the intent to provide opportunities for talented skateboarders across the country to improve their performance and potentially reach the

Olympic Games. At these sites, Skateboard GB will attempt to understand how to identify talented skateboarders and what they need to help support them progress. Since the project is currently in the pilot stage, the learnings from the four hub skateparks will help Skateboard GB develop standards and guidelines for further hubs with an aim to involve more skateboarders, so the scheme is subject to some change (Skateboard GB, 2021b). Indeed, Skateboard GB note that they reserve the right to alter their progression schemes depending on future circumstances and funding (Skateboard GB, 2022). Progression in the sport is thus linked by Skateboard GB to pushing the competitive edge of certain individuals, and so along with World Skate's notion that creating a standardised judging system will push the progression of edge by incentivising skateboarders to out compete one another, there is a further introduction of 'progression through competition' and 'the power of the individual' within this.

From there, Skateboard GB select skateboarders that have the potential to be successful at future Olympic competitions, providing them with funds for coaching, training, competition planning, qualification event registrations, as well as physical and mental support (Skateboard GB, 2022). Importantly, and similarly to the 2020 Games, the skateboarders for the Paris 2024 Games and onwards are selected based on their ability to perform successfully in a competitive environment. As well as this, the Skateboard GB team is made up of both 'pro' and 'flow' sections, with the pro team consisting of skateboarders that have the best chance of winning a medal at the next upcoming Games, so the Paris 2024 Games for the current cycle, whilst the flow team is made up of those that have the potential to win a medal at the LA 2028 or Brisbane 2032 Games. The pro team receive funding that covers the entire costs of the benefits listed above, whilst the flow team receives funding for 85% of these costs (*Ibid*.). It is thus again the most competitively successful that are rewarded most, reintroducing the concept of 'meritocracy'.

Likewise, this shows a further rationalisation of competition planning and strategy, with professionalised and specifically developed methods of performance maximisation. Indeed, as Whannel (2008) writes, running through the backbone of modern sport is a system based upon competitive individualism, structuring and staging sporting events in a way that emphasises the meritocratic and individualistic values and ethos of capitalism (Cantelon and Gruneau, 1988). Athletes thus become individual units for manufacturing neoliberally inclined images of training, dedication, and success (or lack of ability), in which the most competitive individuals are awarded most (Morrisette, 2014; Coakley, 2011a). In curating such a progression pathway, Skateboard GB is playing into the hands of neoliberal sport, creating a selection of high performing athletes through specific

rationalised training methods and selection criteria that reward those with the most competitive edge. This further characterises skateboarding as a neoliberal sport, through the making of statements that present skateboarding in line with, rather than against, the Olympics' rationale of elite participation and competition.

Many of the developments that are charted above already exist for other Olympic sports, and to many sports fans may seem obvious and necessary characteristics of sport. However, as argued throughout Section 2.2, such a form of sport is not politically neutral. Rather, it is a commodified form of sport that is governed in line with neoliberal principles of competitive individualism. In the case of Skateboard GB then, the NF is actively organising skateboarding at the national scale in such a way that reifies skateboarding further as a neoliberalised practice through organising its practices through such discourses. This is true for other World Skate recognised NFs, like USA Skateboarding (2019, *np.*) for example, whose primary aim is to 'achieve sustained competitive excellence'. In terms of Skateboard GB, they are under contractual obligation, due to their association with World Skate, who in turn must align with the principles of the Olympic Movement, to create national competition ecosystems and athlete selection and progression programmes. In this sense, the Olympics' rationale of elite participation trickles down through the international and national scale, manifesting in Skateboard GB's policies outlined above, showing how the Olympics works to foster policies of neoliberal sport across the globe in all participating nations.

These are thus deliberate techniques of governance that aim to produce and legitimise a certain form of skateboarding, one that takes emphasis away from skateboarding's subversive nature and instead aims to create a competitive and hierarchical system. What we get then is the diffusion of a certain type of skateboarding through the workings of private governing organisations. These are creating a new mode of governance in the form of contractual relationships between all stakeholders, creating a situation that offers a total monopolised product, informed by neoliberal understandings of progress, development, and competition.

4.5: Skateboard GB: Legitimisation

Like World Skate, Skateboard GB is aware of the difficult task of persuading skateboarders of the worth and legitimacy of having a governing body for an activity that its practitioners consider more a culture and lifestyle than a sport. As David (interview C) notes, we '*had to learn that really early on, its people's lives, it's a lifestyle, it's a culture*'. As a consequence, the organisation see their purpose as '*to*

allow skateboarders to skate more and skate better. So, we're focussed on those two things, because they're really the things that skateboarders wanna do' (David, interview C). As furthered, during the decision-making process, the NF ask '*is that going to compromise the integrity of the culture? And if it is, then we don't do it*', since '*what right have we* [Skateboard GB] *got to come in and say we own that, and you've now got to affiliate and sanction and say everything has to be done in a certain way. We don't see that as our role*' (David, interview C). In this sense, Skateboard GB, like World Skate, are aware of the attention they need to pay to the nuances of skateboarding if they are to be granted legitimacy. As mentioned however, within skateboarding, legitimacy comes not only through attention to these, but also entails the need for outside organisations to be seen to be adding to skateboarding in some way (Lombard, 2010). Ultimately then, the organisation wants to be one '*that adds value and protects*' (David, interview C) in order to bridge the tension between institutional governance and a culture that generally prioritises self-governance and organisation (Lombard, 2010). Lee (interview D) noted this most clearly, '*not everybody might love the notion of a governing body in skateboarding, but there's a lot of things that we can do which will help skateboarding*'.

4.5.1: A Commitment to Grassroots Skateboarding

In line with this, and taking note of skateboarding's grassroots DIY values, the NF do have a visibly committed stance to grassroots skateboarding. In Skateboard GB's *Skateboard Facility Guidance* document for example, they note that it is 'necessary to facilitate the provision of not just skateparks, but also skateable public spaces in our towns and cities, by which we mean public spaces which positively welcome and cater for a diversity of uses and people, including skateboarding and skateboarders', listing examples of cities that have done this well, including Tampere, Malmö, Melbourne, Paris, Glasgow and more (Skateboard GB, 2020: 35). During the interview with David (interview C), it was also apparent that the NF are developing an ongoing strategy to support grassroots skateboarding. In October 2019 for example, Skateboard GB assisted local skateboarders in Sheffield in setting up a small pop-up event at Site Square in order to show how underused city spaces can be animated in new ways by allowing skateboarding to take place, adding lively human activity to previously unused space (Skateboard GB, 2019b). To date, this has included working on over 300 projects with local landowners to create community skate spaces in cities around England.

As part of this strategy, in February 2021 Skateboard GB employed a 'Skateboard Community Development Officer', Chris Lawton, whose aim is to work with the skateboard community, landowners and local authorities to assist in the creation of skateable spaces in urban areas (Skateboard GB, 2021c). This involves creating resources and supporting initiatives to support

skateparks, skate spots and their wider communities. Since, Skateboard GB have undertaken multiple projects that have been deeply involved with the grassroots. One example is Lawton meeting regularly with the grassroots organisation Skate Manchester in order to assist with their ongoing project of setting up a temporary skate park inside an empty unit of Stretford Mall in Manchester. Likewise, Skateboard GB worked with the Hackney Bumps Community Group to redevelop the Hackney Bumps skate space in East London, built initially in the 1980s but fell into disrepair following the Greater London Council dissolution in 1986. A final example is Skateboard GB working with local skateboarders in Birmingham, lobbying Birmingham City Council to grant permanent permission to the Bournbrook DIY skatepark, a space built by local Birmingham skateboarders and has been under frequent threat of closure. In December 2021, the space went on to become the first DIY skatepark in the UK to be given formal skatepark status as recognised by the local council (Skateboard GB, 2021a).

The organisation also offers support for skate shops, which are key nodes of skateboarding culture, sponsoring local skateboarders, setting up local jams, providing a space for skateboarders to hang out and more generally just acting as a space for skaters to gravitate towards (Borden, 2019a). As David (interview C) noted, Skateboard GB also asks '*how do we support organisations whether its skate shops, parks, whatever become more sustainable, because the more sustainable they are, the more successful they are and the more skateboarding is growing and that's one thing that we wanna see*'. On their website for example, Skateboard GB provides an almost comprehensive list of skate shops around England including small skater-owned stores in cities across the country. They also sponsor grassroots events, such as Pioneer Skatepark's annual Larriat Awards in St. Albans, a local event organised by the Hertfordshire skate shop Larriat, featuring various 'fun' challenges such as highest and longest ollie, races around the skatepark and mini competition format jams, which provide a counter-narrative to the Olympics' emphasis on elite and competitive participation.

Skateboard GB are thus clearly committed to grassroots skateboarding, and this is important for skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics. The organisation have supported many skateboarding communities across the country and have created multiple new resources for everyday skateboarders from creating new skateable spaces or refurbishing older ones, all through dialogues with their surrounding communities to guidance on how to approach local planners themselves. These spaces are integral to skateboarding and its culture, providing spaces for the practices and norms of skateboarding to be played out (Abulhawa, 2020). Likewise, Skateboard GB promote the sport in some important ways, such as providing supporting skate shops through advertisements or interviews with their owners. Skate shops are again integral to skate culture, often providing the axis that local

scenes develop around, providing sponsorship opportunities or planning local events such as skate jams and skate schools (O'Connor, 2020; Borden, 2019a). Skateboard GB thus do a lot of important work for skateboarding in the UK, and through the interviews it was clear that the organisation wants to leverage skateboarding's Olympic status to provide benefits for everyday skateboarding more than just simply promote and govern skateboarding at the Olympic level. Aside from the CEO, their staff are recruited invariably from the UK's skateboard scene, and so there is close attention to skateboarding's needs.

4.5.2: Aligning Governance with Skate Culture

As well as their commitment to grassroots skateboarding, Skateboard GB also understand their governance of Olympic skateboarding as something done in line with skateboarding culture. They note for example that the progression pathway is going to be made 'in a way that complements the culture of skateboarding' (Skateboard GB, 2021d: *np*). Likewise, as David (interview C) notes in terms of how they are attempting to set up the UK's Olympics qualification system, *'what we are doing is that we are going to put something in place that the skaters feel really comfortable with and want to be a part of, and actually we will help them progress on their journey however far that goes'*. This echoes their earlier statements on adding value to skateboarding, rather than emphasising their ownership and governing from afar. Likewise, Lee (interview D) was clearly passionate about supporting the five aspiration funded Team GB skaters and the values of skateboarding, and aims to work these into Skateboard GB's ethos. As they mention *'skateboarders have always enjoyed competition. We've always done it, but the way we go about supporting people in competition can be done with empathy, kindness, integrity that reflects skateboarding's culture'*. They then explain this by drawing on his perception of skateboarding as different to other sports already included in the Olympics, *'like in other sports, you go ah here's a coach or here's this person that does that role'*, but instead *'my take on it is that that's done in a sense that there's no hierarchy, there's no one telling you how it should be done, like nobody is bothered by where you're from, who you are, what your background is, it just happens'* (Lee, interview D).

Moreover, during the interviews with both David and Lee, both mentioned that they hoped skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics will help change the traditional narrative of elite sport in some way. As David (interview C) noted in relation to gaining the aspiration fund from UK sport, and their current position in which there is not so much pressure for their five skateboarders' competition results, *'I feel like we have almost changed the way, or helped change the way UK sport have worked, because up until now it has always been about medals, medals, medals'*. Likewise, Lee (interview D)

passionately stated their desires to use the Olympics to showcase his beliefs in skateboarding, '*if it wasn't for skateboarding, I wouldn't be where I am today. Why not show that to the rest of the world? Why not say, look at all of the amazing things I got from skateboarding, why not introduce that. One of the biggest platforms we are ever gunna be able to introduce skateboarding to a broad range of people is the Olympics Games. We can go right, this is skateboarding, introduce new people, and give them the same opportunities and countless others have had to be part of something that is really meaningful and really caring*'.

These are admirable claims and deserve recognition as Skateboard GB's commitment to skateboarding and skate culture. However, and similar to my argument in terms of World Skate's commitment to skateboarding, these values are nevertheless coupled to a system of competitive sports that is built around neoliberalism. As shown, their various actions, rules and regulations all serve to introduce concepts of sport centred around classical neoliberal tropes such as individualism, quantification, performance measurement and maximisation that all serve to ensure the smooth running of competition. These concepts work together to create a theoretical formulation of Olympic skateboarding that suits the neoliberal model of sport. Indeed, when skateboarding appeared on the screens of the IOC's formidable audience numbers many of whom will likely not be skateboarders, the version of skateboarding that they saw was one based around elite performance, showing performances of the world's 'best' competitive skateboarders. The broadcast, for example, and as I will show in Chapter 5, served to relay market-based discourses of competitive individualism, narrativising the athletes on screen and turning them into vehicles for the dissemination of neoliberal sporting logic alongside scoreboard rankings and commercial banners. The work that Skateboard GB are doing for the skateboarding community is limited by this.

4.6: Benefits of Skateboarding's inclusion into the Games

Whist the above sections are critical of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic programme, showing its new governance structures work to increase the entrenchment of neoliberalism in skateboarding, there has been some important benefits, especially so in terms of accessibility within skateboarding. These sections thus further show how processes of neoliberalisation are not a blanket process, but are characterised by inconsistency and contradiction, rooted in the socio-cultural context under examination. In this case, contradictions arise through the benefits that this process is bringing to skateboarding.

4.6.1: Gender Relations in Skateboarding

As Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) note, despite commentators suggesting that skateboarding has provided space for more progressive gender power relations, it has nevertheless traditionally excluded women from high-performance competitions, media coverage, and professional employment. As a result, it is the case that women are often more in favour of skateboarding's inclusion into the Games. Claims that come from the skate community that skateboarding is 'selling out' or that it is losing its authenticity by being included into the Games are embedded within skateboarding's inherent masculinity, coming mainly from white, male industry leaders in response to the emergence of a sportification process that is not immediately centred around them and their own vision of skateboarding (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). On the other hand, further commercialisation and institutionalisation within sports can provide opportunities for gender equality since it allows for such issues to be addressed at an institutional level through policies that push institutions to be more inclusive of women and girls (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018).

This is reflected in skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games. Indeed, as detailed in the IOC's 2020 Olympic Agenda, gender inequality was a key concern for the postponed 2020 Olympic Games, with an aim to achieve 50/50 gender participation in sports for the first time in Olympic history. In December 2020 however, the IOC (2020a) reiterated this, noting that the Tokyo games will not meet this target, and now it is instead set for the Paris 2024 Games. Despite this shortcoming, this commitment from the IOC shows the benefit that can come from such organisation and management. With skateboarding's inclusion into the Games then, it is important to re-examine the impacts on inclusivity within the sport (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018).

Realising skateboarding's history of unequal gender relations then, World Skate (2020; *np*) note, that 'with the inclusion of skateboarding in the Olympics, the opportunity and accessibility for women has increased dramatically, but we still have a long way to go. All of us must do a better job when it comes to confronting structural inequality based on gender, confronting entitlement, and as a community welcoming change'. In this sense, there appears to be some institutional recognition of the issue of gender within skateboarding, and that World Skate have a role to push for change. Indeed, as a member of the Olympic Movement, World Skate is contractually bound by the Olympic Charter to put into practice the policies that the IOC set for their partner institutions and so they must work in line with the IOC's stated commitment to gender equality. Following this then, skateboarding's debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games featured equal gender participation among athletes, involving 40 men and 40 women.

There has also been some effect in the wider skate industry, with Street League Skateboarding including women in their competitions in 2015 for the first time since the competition began in 2010. As Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) note, the timing of this was not coincidental, but as many industry insiders revealed, was done in line with skateboarding's inclusion into the Games in order to ensure that Street League could partner with World Skate and the Olympic Movement and retain its legitimacy and relevance within this newly forming sector of skateboarding, demonstrating its commitment to the IOC's gender equality policy (*Ibid.*).

Within the context of the UK and Skateboard GB, the NF has made some important steps in tackling gendered power relations within skateboarding participation at a national level. Firstly, in line with the Olympics' gender equality requirements, Skateboard GB's 2021 national championships contained both 8 men and women in both the street and park disciplines, in which Girl Skate UK, a leading community platform for the UK female skateboarding scene, helped select those included in the women's quota (Skateboard GB, 2021e). Equal prizes of £7,000 for top place were also awarded in each discipline. The age of many of the female competitors here is outstanding, with many being young pre and early teen girls such as Molly Seed (12), Bombette Martin (15), Lola Tamblin (13), Roxanna Howlet (11) and many others around this age. It is for these reasons that females and girls are mostly in favour of the Olympics, not just for younger skateboarders but for more established female skaters too (Wheaton and Thorpe, 2018).

Figure 8: The three podium finishers of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding women's street competition. Left to right – Rayssa Leal (14 years old, silver medal), Momiji Nishiya (15 years old, gold medal), Funa Nakayama (17 years old, bronze medal). Source: A.Ricardo, Photo ID: 2016862958, https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/l-r-rayssa-leal-bra-momiji-2016862958

Likewise, Skateboard GB has played an important role in providing a platform and further opportunities for female skateboarders through their support of Sky Brown, selecting her as one of the five skateboarders chosen to receive UK Sport's Aspiration Fund. This allowed her to compete in World Skate sanctioned events around the world, and subsequently qualify for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics as the third-ranked female park skateboarder worldwide. Likewise, 15-year-old Bombette Martin, who was not part of the Aspiration Fund but has nevertheless received dedicated training from Skateboard GB was also able to qualify for the Olympics in 19th place and then became the first female skateboarder to begin a run at the Olympic Games (Lee, Interview D). Skateboard GB has been important here in working with these young skateboarders as well as their families to take them to competitions and helping to develop their talent and performance.

During the qualification process, both Sky and Bombette have also received sponsorship deals from the skateboard industry and extensive coverage on national media (BBC 2019b; BBC 2021a; Sky News, 2023). Likewise, Roxanna Howlett has been covered on BBC following her victory in Skateboard GB's 'virtual national championships', which took place during spring 2020 (BBC, 2020). This type of structural investment and media coverage is important and indeed necessary in promoting inclusion so that people can develop the skills necessary to be part of the scene, and in the face of a history of scarce investment in women through sponsorship deals this is a crucial development (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). Moreover, Sky Brown was awarded a bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Games, which, as expected in national media when someone wins a medal, led to extensive coverage, remarking on the incredible performance at such a young age that made her Team GB's youngest ever Olympic medallist. Due to her young age, the coverage has been aimed at general audiences (BBC 2021b), as well as younger audiences such as BBC Newsround, aimed at 6-12 year-old children. The latter sees her explain her goal to inspire other young girls to participate in sports (BBC Newsround, 2021). Her appearance and coverage were indeed far reaching, and many of the conversations I have had myself with both skateboarders and non-skateboarders involved unprompted comments on Sky Brown's performance from the other part, noting their surprise and amazement and how they thought it was important that other women and girls could look up to someone with such a platform.

Lastly, throughout these media appearances and competition performances, Brown often referred to how she wanted to become a role model for other girls who feel like they are not included in sport. This has led to articles published that chart the impact that Sky Brown has had on inspiring others. Bristol Campus Skatepark Female youth engagement worker Bella Warley (in Ketibuagh-Foley, 2021; *np*) for example noted that 'we just had a day where we had 10 kids skating with us and Sky Brown

was mentioned so many times'. Importantly however, the coverage of Sky Brown, Bombette Martin, and others has been more frequent in mainstream media outlets such as BBC and Sky than their mention in 'core' skate media outlets such as *Thrasher*, *Transworld* and The Berrics, highlighting once more how masculinity is embedded within the core skateboarding industry.

Increased participation in this way does not unproblematically lead to gender equality, however. Firstly, as Abulhawa (2020) notes, creating separate men's and women's teams or divisions often leads to less media attention for women's teams, or them having to prove that they are worthy of the same attention that men's teams receive. This is especially true for skateboarding where women's skateboarding is often attributed to a lower status or seen as a deviance from skateboarding's core. Secondly, whilst female participation platforms women and can inspire others and facilitate feelings of inclusion and value, the issue is not simply one of participation in a performative sense, but one of the wider industry as a whole. To realise their involvement and potential within skateboarding, women and girls need to be exposed to others that look like themselves in other roles such as writers, photographer, judges, videographers and so on (*Ibid*.).

The Olympics has seen some development in this matter. World Skate for example have set up a 'gender equality commission', consisting of four women, all skateboarders and all with experience within the skateboard industry that will lead the way to World Skate's 'main goal; complete gender equality' (World Skate 2020; np). As well as this, they appointed Leticia Bufoni, a renowned female skateboarder from Brazil, as athlete representative, important if World Skate want to understand the needs of their female athletes rather more fully than reinforcing the dominance of men in these positions. Nevertheless, the IOC and skateboarding governing bodies must do more for gender equality than push for equal participation.

Skateboard GB's appointment of Lucy Adams as Progression Project Lead is important here too. Due to the prevalence of men in skateboarding and its media, a physical culture has arisen in which bodily intelligence is connected intrinsically to men and masculinity. Bodily intelligence here refers to the internal recognition of one's ability to perform certain movements (Abulhawa, 2020). Due to the lack of women and girls in skateboarding participation and decision-making, this bodily intelligence has led to the exclusion of women and girls since they either feel as though they do not belong or in some cases that they are incapable of such movements at all. Whilst the new wave of female athletes in skateboarding such as Sky Brown, Bombette Martin, Rayssa Leal and others serves an important role in reversing this issue, having people such as Lucy Adams in curating progression pathways for the

Games means that the dissemination of bodily intelligence in skateboarding is not coming solely from men. Instead, a type of intelligence and understanding can be formed in dialogue with female skateboarders, fostering a more inclusive environment.

4.6.2: Adaptive Skateboarding

Skateboarding's Inclusion into the Olympic Games has thus led to some important developments for gender relations within skateboarding. It is not only just gender relations that are an issue in skateboarding, however. Those with disabilities have also traditionally been excluded, although this has received significantly less attention in skateboarding's academic literature. During an interview with Francis, a representative of the Adaptive Skate Committee for USA's IOC recognised NF USA Skateboarding, for example (Francis, interview E), it was clear that skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics has led to some important advances within adaptive skateboarding. They noted how USA Skateboarding are pushing for the entry of adaptive skateboarding into the Paralympics by LA 2028, when skateboarding will become part of the official Olympic programme, and that the NF, along with the Adaptive Skate Committee can set a loose path towards creating an adaptive skate infrastructure at the national level that other countries can emulate and adapt to their own needs.

The committee see their role as to raise awareness for adaptive skateboarding and providing inspiration for the younger generation, showing that there are still ways to skateboard despite not being able-bodied and believing that '*skateboarding can be that device and that inspirational tool in their lives, and I know it has been for many of us*'. As they noted however, so far '*we've relied solely on the grassroots […] but the whole big push now is trying to get the inclusion with the skateboard industry to back these same skateboarders and give them the same opportunities, similar to you know how we've seen women's skateboarding have a big influx recently*' (Francis, Interview E). The underlying hope therefore is that the Paralympics and the work that USA Skateboarding and Committee have been doing more generally will advance the work that the adaptive skate community have been doing at the ground level, and so will further '*recruit and get the numbers up in participation and the awareness out there that for adaptive skateboarding and hopefully there's gunna, you know, the younger generation of amputees or disabled athletes that are gunna jump on board […] because they are out there but at least in the United States for sure, they're out there, it's just scattered and all of them don't have the same financial opportunities that say your other pro skateboarders would*' (Francis, interview E).

The important point here is that the institutional framework provided by an Olympic sport can be beneficial in gathering finances, raising awareness, and creating opportunities. For Francis (interview E), this goes beyond just raising awareness of and providing inspiration through adaptive skateboarding to providing financial opportunities to adaptive skateboarders and '*the opportunities they would need to travel and compete and everything just like the regular skateboard teams*', which they notes has so far been lacking in adaptive skateboarding, despite recent advances over the last decade. So it is not just about creating opportunities in the first instance, but ensuring an entire framework that exists to support and maintain adaptive skateboarding and its athletes in a more long-term way, similar to that which is currently being constructed for Olympic skateboarding at present.

Whilst the governance frameworks that are newly emerging within skateboarding as a result of its inclusion into the Olympics further neoliberalise the practice, the effects are not always to the detriment of the sport's ethos. It is the case that the neoliberal values that the IOC and the Olympic Movement assign to sport trickle down through World Skate and Skateboard GB, ending in the curating of a neoliberal system of skateboarding from the international to national scale. However, the IOC's policies that require gender equality in participation have done the same, trickling down through the governing bodies to ensure that they are dedicated to equal gender participation, providing opportunities and platforms for women and girl skateboarders. As well as participation however, skateboarding's inclusion into the Games has meant the creation of new roles within the industry, many of which have been appointed to women and are aimed at impacting skateboarding's unequal gender relations. Likewise, whilst adaptive skateboarding is not yet a confirmed Olympic sport, there is ongoing work, most significantly by USA Skateboarding and its Adaptive Skate Committee, to ensure its inclusion in the LA 2028 Games. This will likewise create opportunities and platforms for those athletes excluded from skateboarding in this sense.

Together then, those traditionally excluded from skateboarding are hoping that its inclusion into the Games will lead to beneficial and long-lasting changes that work in favour of bridging the gaps in participation, decision making and financial support. In many cases, this has already begun in some highly significant ways as outlined above. Work is still needed, however. Lucy Adams is currently the only female on Skateboard GB's permanent team. Moreover, only 3/11 of the NF's board of directors are women. All other members of Skateboard GB are white males. Likewise, all three individuals currently employed by World Skate specifically in relation to skateboarding are men. As Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) have shown, for skateboarding's inclusion into the Games to have significant and long-

lasting impacts on inclusivity, those excluded from skateboarding must be hired in decision making roles.

4.7: Conclusion

Contemporary sport exists as a rule governed practice, tightly managed by private organisations that serve to shape the way sport is represented and understood in society more generally (Vamplew; 2018; Coakley, 2011a). The Olympics and the OM are the clearest example of this to date, with an immense governance framework that works to standardise sport from the international to national level (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbot, 2008). This is set in motion by the Olympic Charter, codifying the values of Olympism to which all organisations wishing to join the OM must submit and adhere to. As detailed in the literature review chapter, the IOC, the Charter, and the OM work to create a deliberately curated neoliberal form of sport based around competitive individualism in which stories of heroic individuals tout the benefits of productivity and success, maintaining that this is the ultimate path to prosperity. Using a Foucauldian policy discourse analysis, which serves to reveal how and why certain practices come to dominate in the social realm, the above analysis shows the meanings that Olympic skateboarding's governing bodies are giving to the practice, which, through the introduction of certain concepts, load it with ideological implications that define it along certain lines. Following this type of analysis then, the above concepts work to create a group of individualisable statements that in turn form the discourse of Olympic skateboaridng. They thus designate skateboarding as a theoretical formulation, that is a set body of meanings and knowledges that define what the practice is and how it should be done through the dissemination of discourse.

Governmentality works through the reconfiguration of individuals into productive market actors, competing against one another in order to maximise their efficiency and success (Brown, 2018). The emphasis here is thus on the construction of individual qualities and subjectivities within individuals, rather than a forceful, top-down mode of power. This is where neoliberal policies orientated towards competition and individual responsibility come in, producing signs that show the correct path to human development, and orientating societal norms and values to fit such a system. From there, it becomes one's responsibility to act in line with these to ensure their own success (Brown, 2018). The crux of a governmentality approach is thus an attention to how social and political forces guide the formation of certain knowledges and discourses that run through the social realm, creating systems of truth, defining the limits of possibility, and thereby materialising unequal operations of power (Cole et al., 2004).

As Liao and Markula (2009) note however, discourses are not inherently good or bad, and so attention must thus be drawn to the social contexts in which texts are found and discourses produced, highlighting the ways in which they are used and to what effect. This forms the genealogical element of discourse analysis, as explained in Section 3.3.2. It is my contention here that the end product of such a form of governance is a type of sport that works as neoliberal governmentality, normalising the presence of market-based discourses and logics within sport so that they become taken for granted norms (Miller, 2009). Since genealogical research is about locating forms of power and the channels they take, the governance of sport, in this case the governance of skateboarding following its inclusion into the Olympics is one such channel of power, disseminating discourses that have a neoliberalising effect. Indeed, by neoliberalising sport in this way, sport ultimately works to reinforce the reach and hegemony of neoliberalism within everyday life (Coakley, 2011a).

This chapter shows the first step of this process, and how it is happening in real-time through skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games. Through policy discourse analysis, I have highlighted how Olympic level governance is working to make neoliberalism an increasingly salient part of skateboarding, forcing it to resemble traditional neoliberal sports and in turn characterising it as an arm of neoliberal governmentality. This starts with the IOC's requirements for governing bodies. These requirements guide the actions of the international and national governing bodies who must work to ensure they meet these policies. The governing bodies must therefore put in place certain features such qualification systems, competition frameworks, select and train athletes and so on, all of which are characteristics of neoliberal sport. The neoliberal values of Olympism thus run from the IOC, through the international and down to the national level (figure 9). Whilst these organisational phenomena are familiar to most sports, they are unprecedented in skateboarding, and are being created and enacted in real time.

As Springer (2010) writes however, neoliberalism is not a blanket process, but one that is often fraught with contradictions dependent on the context of its deployment. Skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics Games is emblematic of this, since alongside curating a neoliberal sporting system within skateboarding, these newly created governing systems and organisations are also working in line with skateboarding's more alternative tendencies in some ways. Indeed, as Batuev and Robinson (2017; 2019) argue, due to general the anti-institutional ethos of skateboarding and other lifestyle sports, governing organisations must legitimise themselves and prove their relevance to the wider culture and lifestyle that they state they are wishing to enter. In this case, World Skate have made

multiple commitments to the development of skateboarding as the organisation are wary of skateboarding's scepticism towards outside organisations and of governance in general and aim to show how the Olympics can benefit everyday grassroots skateboarding. The organisation even mirrors skateboarding's traditional anti-competitive sports ethos, claiming they wish to use skateboarding to change the wider mainstream sports landscape.

| International Olympic Committee | → | Sets out values of Olympism and requirements for governing bodies as detailed in the Olympic Charter. |

| Creates standardised competition, judging and ranking systems as required by the IOC. | ← | World Skate (IF) |

| Skateboard GB (NF) | → | Creates national competition structures and athlete selection and training programmes in accordance with World Skate and the IOC, as well as national stakeholders. |

Ends in a form of skateboarding in the UK that is predicated upon competitive participation and performance maximisation.

Figure 9: Governance of skateboarding at the Olympic Level. This figure shows how the IOC's neoliberal system of sports runs through skateboarding's governing bodies to create an increasingly neoliberal form of skateboarding.

Likewise, Skateboard GB make claims to the development of skateboarding through leveraging the Olympics as a tool to do so. In this case, close attention to skateboarding culture and practice has led to some favourable results, such as a strong and passionate commitment to grassroots skateboarding, including assisting in conversations with local councils for example. Similarly to World Skate, these actions serve to legitimise the NF within wider skate culture. This shows that the neoliberalisation of sport is not a straightforward task (Giulianotti and Numerato, 2018). In this case it requires careful attention to, and use of, the nuances of skateboarding that generally make up its resilience towards

neoliberalism in the social realm. This is done in order to justify its entry into the Olympics and associated governance.

Moreover, another way in which these contextually specific contradictions arise is through the benefits that skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics is presenting for those historically marginalised from the skateboarding community, such as women, girls, and adaptive skateboarders. I have shown how the IOC's commitment to hosting a 50/50 gender-equal event by Paris 2024 has meant that skateboarding had to ensure it had equal participation rates for both the men's and women's discipline, and whilst this may even be talking about the world in antiquated ways, it has been greatly significant in providing opportunities, sponsorship deals and media coverage for those women and girls participating in the Games. Likewise, as an interview with Francis from the USA Adaptive Skate Committee (interview E) shows, USA Skateboarding are aiming to utilise the Games to springboard adaptive skateboarding's inclusion into the Paralympics by LA 2028, through the creation of formalised opportunities such as financial resources, travel opportunities for competitions, endorsements, and a new platform with which to raise awareness.

Ultimately, however, these organisations are still submitting to the Olympic competitive sports system, therefore reinforcing its primacy over other alternative practices. As such, this deadens skateboarding's ability to offer these alternatives. Indeed, as Nauright and Pope (2017) argue, such a form of sport perpetuates the problems of neoliberal capitalism, refusing to offer alternative movement-based practices centred around democratic practice, quality of life and community. Indeed, as I will show in the next chapter, these policies work to create a type of sport, in the form of the actual Olympic skateboarding event itself, that relays neoliberally inclined discourses throughout the social realm.

5: Presenting Neoliberal Sport: Skateboarding at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

5.1: Introduction

  This chapter gives an analysis of skateboarding's actual appearance at the delayed Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. The Games took place from Friday 23rd July 2021 – Sunday 8th August 2021. On 8th July 2021 however, two weeks before the Games were scheduled to take place, both national and international spectators were banned from attending any of the Olympic events due to Tokyo entering a state of emergency amid rising COVID-19 cases on the day that the IOC committee arrived in Tokyo 2020. Media personnel were still allowed entry however, so the event could still be televised and reported (see Section 1).

  Originally, as mentioned in the methodology (Section 3.1), this chapter was to be based on data obtained through an ethnography of the event itself. Due to banning of both international travel to Japan and of spectators from the event, however this became impossible. As such, the chapter uses the BBC's televised coverage of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding events. There were four skateboarding competitions in total, which were split into two disciplines: men and women's street (25th and 26th July), and men and women's park (4th and 5th August). 20 skateboarders took part in each, for a total of 80. Each event first had four heats, or prelims, in which the 20 skateboarders were randomly split into four groups of five, with five skaters per heat, which happened one after the other on the same day. The eight skateboarders with the highest overall scores after all four heats were completed then qualified for the final. In this sense, a skater may have the highest score of their respective heat but if they did not make the top 8 overall scores, then they did not qualify for the final. The finals happened on the same day as the respective heats. Events and participants are broken down further in table 2.

  For the BBC televised live coverage, the event was hosted by JJ Chalmers and Tim Warwood. Chalmers was based in a studio and Warwood was based at the Ariake Urban Sports Park, the purpose built skatepark in which the event took place. The pair then introduced the events and discussed them afterwards but did not appear during the duration of the actual event. Instead, the competitions were co-commentated live by Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill.

Men's Street
25th July 2021

Heat 1	Heat 2	Heat 3	Heat 4	Final
Felipe Gustavo	Shane O'Neil	Aurélien Giraud	Angelo Caro Narvaez	Aurelian Giraud
Vincent Milou	Jake Ilardi	Nyjah Huston	Gustavo Ribeiro	Jagger Eaton
Jagger Eaton	Sora Shirai	Brandon Valjalo	Giovanni Vianna	Nyjah Huston
Micky Papa	Kelvin Hoefler	Manny Santiago	Axel Cruysberghs	Kelvin Hoefler
Carlos Gonzales	Yuto Horigome	Matt Berger	Yukito Aoki	Vincent Milou
				Yuto Horigome
				Caro Narvaez
				Gustavo Ribeiro

Womens's Street
26th July 2021

Heat 1	Heat 2	Heat 3	Heat 4	Final
Keet Oldenbeuving	Roos Zwetsloot	Funa Nakayama	Rayssa Leal	Momiji Nishiya
Mariah Duran	Aori Nishimura	Momiji Nishiya	Zeng Wenhui	Rayssa Leal
Asia Lanzi	Margielyn Didal	Pamela Rosa	Alexis Sablone	Funa Nakayama
Andrea Benítez	Hayley Wilson	Charlotte Hym	Leticia Bufoni	Alexis Sablone
Annie Guglia	Julia Brueckler	Alana Smith	Lore Bruggeman	Roos Zwetsloot
				Zeng Wenhui
				Margielyn Didal
				Aori Nishimura

Women's Park
4th August 2021

Heat 1	Heat 2	Heat 3	Heat 4	Final
Sakura Yosozumi	Kokona Hiraki	Sky Brown	Misugu Okamoto	Sakura Yosozumi
Dora Varella	Jordyn Barrat	Yndiara Asp	Bryce Wettstein	Kokona Hiraki
Lilly Stoephasius	Brighton Zeuner	Madeleine Larcheron	Poppy Olsen	Sky Brown
Bombette Martin	Lizzie Armanto	Julia Benedetti	Isadora Pacheco	Misugu Okamoto
Josefina Tapia Varas	Melissa Williams	Amelia Brodka	Xin Zhang	Poppy Olsen
				Bryce Wettstein
				Dora Varella
				Yndiara Asp

Men's Park
5th August 2021

Heat 1	Heat 2	Heat 3	Heat 4	Final
Zion Wright	Pedro Quintas	Luiz Francisco	Pedro Barros	Keegan Palmer
Heimana Reynolds	Danny León	Kieran Woolley	Keegan Palmer	Pedro Barros
Andy Anderson	Jaime Mateu	Steven Piñeiro	Cory Juneau	Cory Juneau
Ivan Federico	Alessandro Mazzara	Vincent Matheron	Ayumu Hirano	Luiz Francisco
Rune Glifberg	Tyler Edtmayer	Dallas Oberholzer	Oskar Rozenberg	Kieran Woolley
				Steven Piñeiro
				Vincent Matheron
				Pedro Quintas

Table 2: All participants in the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding competitions.

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As Section 2.2.2 explains, over the last five decades, and in line with the expansion of leisure and entertainment industries, media sport has come to be a salient part of everyday life for billions of people across the globe (Silk, 2004). This is especially so during the COVID-19 pandemic with the cancellation of live events and then the banning of spectators once events restarted. Due to the mass audiences that televised sport has gathered over recent decades, it has become a huge source of revenue for sports organisations and television broadcasters, leading to a conflation of sport broadcasting and corporate interest in what is known as the 'sports-media complex' (Jhally, 1984). The result is a form of sport that is increasingly compliant with the economic demands of broadcasters (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). It becomes transformed into a set of commodified global spectacles (Whannel, 2009) ending as a spectator product – a finished product ready for a viewer audience (Vamplew, 2018).

Indeed, As Whannel (2009) writes, these technological innovations allow televised sport to undergo a continuous renewal of its appeal through the adoption of new technologies as they are developed. Televised sport provides a unique experience in this way due to its ability to manipulate the temporal and spatial dynamics of the event through different media technologies (Barnfield, 2013). Techniques used to do so include live commentary, slow motion replays, scoring systems and scoreboards, and an overall narrativising of the event. These techniques are used to dramatise contemporary sporting events, introducing narratives of success, determination and exertion that have become synonymous with contemporary sport (see Section 2.2.4)

In the case of the Olympic Games, which dominates the media landscape during its duration, audiences are presented stories of host nations and their cultures and aspirations, all whilst successful athletes are presented alongside narratives of determination, domination, and loss. During the Rio 2016 Games for example, considerable attention was given to Michael Phelps as he added six more medals to his total of 28, consolidating his position as the most successful swimmer. Following the Tokyo 2020 Games, the BBC (2022: *np*) write of how British 100m and 200m runner 'Dina Asher-Smith says she is now a "stronger athlete" and will race in May's Birmingham Diamond League ahead of defending her world and European titles this summer'. In instances such as these, events are portrayed as intense battles, dominated by specific individuals whose titles and reputations are at stake. During events themselves, commentators frame the athletes' actions in relation to the goals of reaching first place, setting a new time record or to score more points than the opposing side. Athletes' actions are thus dramatised to meet this end, driven by narratives of success and failure (Fischer and McClearen, 2020). For Ryan (1993) this introduces themes to sporting events such as

'Last Chance, Fatal Error, Futility, Wasted Opportunities, Opportunism, Redemption, Downfall of the Hero, Triumph of the Hero, Confrontation Between Hero and Anti-Hero, Doomed, and It Ain't Over Until It's Over'. As a result, competition is solidified as the main feature of Olympic events. The sports are presented as displays of competitive excellence, of exertion of strength, and a chance to show the world how great each individual athlete or team is. To this end, 'the Olympics is, indeed, part sporting event, but is also part reality show' (Billings et al., 2017 :1).

Just like the governance of sport then, sport media is not politically neutral. As Whannel (2009) notes, media sport also has an impact on social practices, working to sustain systems of domination whereby the events unfolding on screen become mechanisms through which public discourses are enacted (Maguire, 2011). Due to the traditional neoliberal characteristics of organised competitive sport and practices of the organisations that uphold them, those that I have shown in Chapter 4, these discourses are likewise based around market logic and competitive individualism (Morissette, 2014). As I will show here then, sports events can be framed in specific ways that work to promote neoliberalised readings and understandings of sport.

Following on from Chapter 4 then, which showed how skateboarding's Olympic level governance serves to introduce neoliberalised concepts of sport into skateboarding, I will draw attention here to the ways that individualised competition is subsequently emphasised in the event to create competitive narrative dramas as a way of making it more marketable to, and exciting for audiences. This chapter therefore builds on the previous one by critically analysing the type of sport that such a governance framework works to create. It also furthers the argument that sports are a key mode of neoliberal governmentality which firstly involves the creation of specific policies and codes that lay the foundations of a marketised society, and then from there the dissemination of market-based discourses that work to reinforce the prevalence of neoliberalism in everyday life.

It is the case however, that these narratives within sport can be challenged. One way in which this can occur is through the actions and sentiments of the athletes themselves. As Carless and Douglass (2012) show, for example, many elite athletes prioritise relationships and connections between their fellow athletes and others that they meet on their sporting journey. This challenges the individualising tendencies of contemporary sporting narratives (see Section 2.2.3). Likewise, Caldwell (2020) shows how players construct notions of solidarity and power with each other through an analysis of on-field text tracking. Building on this then, I bring attention to skateboarding's resilient qualities, skateboarding presents a challenge to the traditional script of competition, success and failure that characterises Olympic events.

Indeed, as argued in Section 2.3.6, skateboarding can offer resilience towards the hegemony of neoliberalism, responding to the forces that pull skateboarding into the mainstream in ways that seek to preserve the perceived core values of skate culture. One way in which this occurs is through culturally specific manifestations of jouissance within the practice. Indeed, by realising the internal joy of sport through the triumph of process over product and a skate *with* rather than *against* ethos of comradery (see Section 2.3.7), skateboarding offers a creative alternative through its practitioners' insistence on community and practice for enjoyment's sake, rather than for some external productive goal. Through their behaviours and values then, skateboarders provide counter-narratives to sport as a site of everyday domination (Carrington, 2009). Following an analysis of how skateboarding is neoliberalised through the Games then, and by drawing on theorisations of jouissance as an instrument through which one can escape existing forms of domination (Barthes, 1975), I will thus show how the participating skateboarders show resilience to this process, in turn presenting new ways forward for physical movement that move beyond the economically generative (Newman, 2014). Indeed, for Pickerill and Chatterton (2006: 737), building an oppositional politics begins by 'enacting change in everyday life'. Thinking in this way allows everyday acts and gestures to become meaningful, representing social relations of disruption (Hollett and Vivoni, 2021).

As a result of this specific focus on the broadcast of the skateboarding events, some elements were necessarily emitted from the research presented in this chapter. Indeed, attendance at the event would have allowed a chance to interrogate the more-than-human and non-representational aspects of the events. As Koch (2018) writes, temporary events such as the Olympics or other sporting events serve as a unique confluence of diverse actors, both human and more-than-human. To this end, ethnographic attendance at the event would have permitted an exploration of the affective dimensions present throughout, their varying rhythms and intensities, and how these are bound up in the performance of skateboarding at the Olympics and the displays of skate culture and resilience littered throughout. Specifically, this includes elements of skateboarding such as the atmosphere of the spaces in which it is performed, itself formed through more-than-human elements such as the sounds of skater's voices, music, or the skateboards themselves as the participants are performing tricks. This could also have included smells, such as that of being outside in the humid Tokyo summer air. There were also off-camera moments lost through the broadcast, such as the participants' practice sessions, or interactions occurring in and around the course during the event that were not shown on camera.

Indeed, as geographical study into the non-representational shows, such more-than-human elements of social life work as 'a series of non-conscious capacities and receptivities that shape the ways in which individuals think and act' (Ash, 2013: 29). They are therefore bound up not just in the creation of human bodies, but in the formation of social fabric more generally (Lorimer, 2008). Such an investigation would have thus allowed the more affective and transient ways in which forms of domination and resilience play out. Nevertheless, analysing the broadcast through discourse analysis allowed close attention to be paid to the framing of the event, and to how the skater's and their actions were portrayed to the audience through carefully mediated and contrived means.

On that note then, and making continued use of Foucauldian discourse analysis, the object of analysis in this chapter is Tokyo 2020's skateboarding events. Whilst the enunciations are the techniques used to render the event a spectator product. The concepts are then highlighted throughout four sections and the genealogical element explained in the conclusion. The composition is as follows:

- Section 5.2 shows how the format and rules of the event introduce concepts that serve to create a competitive skateboarding event.

- Section 5.3 then shows how the athletes' actions on screen are conceptualised through logics of competitive individualism, showing skateboarding as a rationalised and productive activity.

- Section 5.4 then shows how the commentary of the event serves to narrativise the competition and individual skateboarders, working to emphasise individual rankings and struggles as well as highlighting battles between participants and emergent rivalries. To do so, I make further use of Foucauldian discourse analysis, putting under scrutiny the words, languages, inflections, and behaviours that these characteristics work to produce and reinforce.

- Moving on, Section 5.5 begins an analysis of how the participants showcase resilience through jouissance within skateboarding, creating their own discourses that work to counter those created through the spectacularisation of the event.

5.2: How the Event Format Produces Olympic Skateboarding

For skateboarding to be showcased as a competitive sport at the Olympic Games, there must first be an event format that lends itself to this. This requires a structure of rules that enable skateboarding to be turned into something that can be quantified, and judged, with athletes then ranked during the event following their trick and run attempts. Likewise, it must also be made exciting

and unpredictable through this competition in order to attract an audience (Vamplew, 2018). This is the IOC's main motive for including skateboarding in the Olympics as stated in the Olympic Agenda 2020; attempting to attract a younger audience in the face of declining viewer numbers within this demographic (IOC, 2014). This first analysis section thus looks at how the format of the skateboarding competitions at the Games is conceptualised in such a way that creates a competitive and pressurised environment that the skateboarders must battle through. Similarly to before, conceptualisation here refers to the introduction of certain concepts into the event, in other words, how it is imagined and brought to life by those involved in its organisation and production. These create a group of statements create discourse within Olympic skateboarding; they say what skateboarding is to the audience, constituting it as a specific theoretical formation.

The presented data includes a description and interrogation of the event format itself, along with comments by the commentators that elaborate on the format and the style of event that it creates, with references to the pressures the athletes face and the strategies they must adopt in line with the requirements of the format. As a result of these, an event is created that is filled with seemingly fair but unpredictable and exciting competition, with rapid and frequent leader board changes, as to fit with the standard and expected format of televised sport and to draw viewers in. The commentators work to reinforce this, building tension and excitement through their comments on the format of the event as well the feelings and actions of the skateboarders. Indeed, as Whannel (1992) writes, the role of the commentator is on one hand to describe the scene, show what is happening and to give the audience an accurate picture of it whilst, on the other hand, it is to frame the material in such a way as to keep the audience interested by creating a narrative and atmosphere, highlighting the action, shaping it into a logical order, blending associated material and adding suspense. In this sense, there is a tension between realism and entertainment as demanded by the creation of sporting spectacles in which the realism of the event becomes construed along the lines of entertainment. It is through this transformation, which the commentator acts as a negotiator of, that televised sport is neoliberalised, as I will show from here.

5.2.1: The 2-5-4 Format

For the street competitions, a '2-5-4' format was used, and scores were awarded between 0-10. This format sees the competition split into two sections, a 'runs' section, in which the skaters first take two turns each at completing a single 45-second run, in which the aim is to land a 'line' of tricks. Within skateboarding, a line refers to the completion of tricks one after another in succession. In this section then, the skateboarders attempt to get the highest scoring line that they can, attempting to

land their best tricks without falling. Once each skateboarder has attempted this twice, the competition then moves on to the 'best trick' section. Here, each skater has five attempts at landing their best single trick on any obstacle on the course to obtain the highest score possible. The tricks are usually more difficult in this stage and sometimes take multiple attempts. The runs generally consist of easier tricks that the participants are more likely to land. The skater's final scores are made up of their best 4 scores out of the entire 7 attempts, including the two runs and five best tricks, hence the name '2-5-4'; there are two runs, five best tricks and then the four highest scores from all of these form the participants' final score. This is not the first example of such a format of skateboarding, since competitions such as SLS use an almost identical formula, but it is significant since it marks competitive skateboarding's debut appearance on the BBC as an Olympic Sport and the extensive coverage that accompanies this.

As mentioned then, for skateboarding to fit into the Olympics, and therefore into the contemporary model of neoliberal sport, it must be formatted in a way that allows it to be appreciated and practised in a controlled environment that is constructed in accordance with the basic principles of neoliberalism (Cantin-Brault, 2019). This requires the introduction of concepts into the sport that achieve this. The above format does this well, presenting skateboarding as a rationalised and competitive activity to its audiences, just as other Olympics sports are presented. Indeed, the scoring of tricks requires predetermined evaluation criteria set out in advance of the competition to avoid any spontaneity that would emerge from free and uncalculated movement. Skateboarders must thus make individual choices that are beneficial to the self, watching their opponents whilst attempting to beat them by working out a way to achieve their highest score possible. Following each run or best trick attempt, the skateboarders are then awarded a single score once their performance has been quantified by the judges, formed through the judging criteria created by the WSIJP, outlined in Section 4.2.2. This literally quantifies the skateboarders' movements, the results of which are then placed in a leader board for that specific competition, showing to the audience that skateboarding is in this case a rationalised activity in which each participant competes with one another and the most successful are rewarded the highest points.

In terms of the concepts introduced by this format then, the need created to obtain the highest score demands that the skaters push their limits and attempt to skate as technically best as they can. This is furthered by the language of 'best' in best trick. This creates a set of statements that characterises performance as something orientated towards a specific individual outcome, to produce

a score. This alludes to concepts of 'individualism', 'rationalisation', and 'productivity', all of which are traditional neoliberal sporting tropes that feed into its competitive nature.

5.2.2: The Pressure of the Format

   As repeatedly mentioned by the commentators during the street events, this format also serves to increase pressure on the skateboarders as the competition draws closer to the end. In this sense, it fits with Barnfield's (2013) notion of chronicle in sport, in which stories are presented as having a beginning that steadily builds up to a climactic end. As commentator Ed Leigh explains during the beginning of the women's street finals, for example, the format '*becomes a pressure cooker. This format creates a sharp end to the finals as everything comes to a head*', then again at the end of the first round: '*These skaters are about to come to the boil in the first ever women's street skateboarding Olympic medals*'. This theme returns with the commentators' comments on Mariah Duran during her 3rd best trick attempt in the first women's street heats: '*She needs this now though, she's got a 1.52 and a 1.42, and she's got two scratches* [scores of 0] *now on her best trick, she's only got three attempts left at this so she can only ditch one of those*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*And this is the thing with this format Ed, as soon as you start getting into this position in the comp, you have to start landing those tricks otherwise you are gunna start disappearing down the heat*' (Churchill, event commentary). Similar comments are made later, during Aori Nishimura's 2nd best trick attempt in the 2nd women's street heats, as if to constantly reinforce this. After failing her first two attempts Leigh begins: '*Two scratches now on her best tricks, she's got two very strong scores from the runs but just generally, this format, the way it does, it's just cranking the pressure up on her*'. Then later, after her final best trick attempt, in which she lands and is awarded a 3.84: '*Landing that has taken a lot of pressure off of this prelim, she's now back to where she wants to be, decent scores on the board*' (Leigh, event commentary).

   The commentators thus build a story, using the event format along with the athletes' actions and scores to refer to a build-up of pressure. This build-up arises due to the ability for any of the skaters to be able to land a high scoring trick during the best trick section which would put them above their opponents, with few turns then to make a recovery. For this reason, the other skateboarders must continue to land their best tricks to ensure that this does not happen. The skateboarders will therefore often try their more technical and difficult and therefore higher scoring tricks at the end of the competition. As Sheppard (2019) notes, the pressure that athletes find themselves under during sporting competitions is a direct result of the physical and psychic stresses that are attached to winning in various ways, whereby the mind and body are pushed in order to achieve success. They are

therefore directly attached to a neoliberalised model of sport that touts success through quantifiably besting opponents as the ultimate goal. The point here then is that the format of this street skateboarding competition is deliberately created to enhance the pressure experienced by the athletes, on one level demanding the athletes to push themselves and attempt their best possible tricks in order to remain above the competition at all times, whilst on another to create an exciting narrative for the audience to latch on to. As elaborated by the commentators, failure in this format is a non-option, with low scores meaning the skaters will quickly fall down the leader board. As such, skateboarding becomes conceptualised as something that entails 'pressure to succeed'. Individual competition is thus presented as the driving force of skateboarding, as required by such a competitive format. In turn, this reinforces the rational and quantified nature of skateboarding in these circumstances, in which all action is measurable in some way.

This element of the event is furthered by frequent references to the unpredictability of the competition, with many changes in scoreboard positions since early lower scores can be dropped from a skater's total in favour of higher ones gained later in the competition. As Marc Churchill explains: '*So this is the thing with this format, you are never out until the last to tricks basically, you know, if you've got good runs*'. This is a point the commentators often return to, as if to remind the audience that the competition standings can change at any moment, keeping the dramatised narratives through the building of tension and anticipation but also emphasising that the skaters are in a tight competition with one another at all times of the event. Following a fall by Vincent Milou during his 4th best trick attempt, for example, the commentators note: '*Vincent Milou is in dream land at the moment, he's got five respectable scores, that's his first scratch but anything he can do now will just up his chances of making it into the top eight*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*And it's probably good to remember that he's not safe yet, and that's the thing with the skaters that are coming up in the next heat, he's gotta push that score up as high as he can*' (Churchill, event commentary). This reminds the viewers that the skaters are at no point are they safe from being knocked out from their chance to enter the finals, therefore meaning they must push themselves as best they can for the duration of the prelims. Once more, all activity must be orientated towards productivity, as required by the competitive format. This returns to earlier concepts of constant 'productivity', and 'pressure to succeed' ensuring all actions are as beneficial as possible to ensure competitive success. It also brings in concepts of 'quantification of performance' along with 'ranking', all working to render competition the driving theme of the event.

Ultimately then, the format of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding event worked to create a specific competitive conceptualisation of the sport, firstly driven by the needs of the sports and media industries but also a driver of neoliberalised discourses that champion individualised competition above all. Through this format, each athlete is thrown into competition with one another, facilitated by live judging and scoring systems that quantify their actions and allow all participants to be ranked. From there, the format of the event requires that the athletes constantly struggle and exert themselves in order to stay at the top of the leader board, driven by the nature of the 2-5-4 format which means leader board positions can rapidly change. Through reference to these actions and scores, the commentators create a narrative of competition, emphasising the pressure that the athletes experience, the unpredictability of the event and the consequent requirement to ensure success. These narratives, and the need for commentators in general, are again symptoms of the institutionally driven need to create an exciting sport (Barnsfield, 2013). Through the format of the competition then, and the live commentary provided by Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill, skateboarding is crafted into a competitive sport. A set of statements thus arise that create a discourse within skateboarding that present the practice as one in which individuals must carefully calculate their actions within an environment of intense pressure, requiring personal exertion in both a physical and mental sense.

5.2.3: An Inversion of the Norms of Skateboarding

A final quote by Marc Churchill, made during the move from the runs section to the best tricks section in the men's street first heart hints at the inversion of norms of skateboarding that had to happen in order to achieve this: '*This is where the show-off gene comes in to play. It's bragging rights, what is your best trick. You can use any obstacle on the course and throw down that big trick*'. This tells the viewer that the skaters are essentially showing off their best tricks, in attempt to best one another. As O'Connor (2020) and Borden (2019a) have shown though, as well as found through my own time spend in my local skate scenes (as I will elaborate later in Chapter 6), this type of skating is at odds with how skateboarding generally happens in an everyday context with showing off actually seen as uncool or un-skater like, whilst co-operation and assisting or being excited for others often being better rewarded (Beal, 1998). What we are seeing in this format then is an inversion of the norms, values, and practices of skateboarding in order to make it a commodified spectator sport product that serves an ideological purpose. Whilst on one level this is an inversion of the norms of skateboarding as it happens on the grassroots, through the trivialising of skateboarding into a competitive sport, skateboarding becomes a tool for working through and transmitting marketised discourses. The commentators make repeated mention of the exertion necessary to win in the

competition for example, as well as the need to make individual and rational choices to stay ahead. This would not, however, be possible without a format that allows these circumstances to actually take place.

5.3: Presenting Skateboarding as a Rationalised and Competitive Activity

The above section shows how the event format creates a competitive atmosphere for the event. This section builds on this, showing how the meaning of skateboarding becomes conflated with the medal focus and competitive strategies inherent to the Games. To do so, it furthers the use of the event presenters' and commentators' comments, showing the kind of discourses that they work to relay.

5.3.1: A Focus on Medals

Just as the men's street competition began, which was the first of the four to take place and be broadcasted, the event was first introduced by BBC studio host JJ Chalmers, sitting in the studio against a computer-generated backdrop of the Tokyo Skyline. The first mention of skateboarding by Chalmers served to instantly conflate it with the Olympics' championing of rationalised competitive sport and its focus on medals-based performance. The event was introduced as such: '*Welcome to day two of these Tokyo Olympic Games. Now yesterday was an absolute cracker and today promises to be more of the same with 18 Gold Medals at stake. Skateboarding makes its Olympic debut today with the men's street competition*' (Chalmers, event commentary). Such an introduction is the norm for an Olympic event. However, this is the first time that skateboarding has been introduced as an Olympic sport and the mentioning first of the 18 gold medals at stake that are building on the excitement of the previous day, and then skateboarding's contribution to this, serves to symbolically link skateboarding with the Olympics' focus on 'competition' and 'performance-based rewards', introducing these as concepts. Likewise, later in the introduction, Chalmers notes how the final will decide '*who will become the first ever men's street gold medallist, that's live at 4:25*'. Here then, Chalmers invites the audience to get excited to find out the victor of the sport by watching from 4:25am onwards, furthering its status as a spectator product, but doing so in a way that generates excitement around the sport through a focus on competition and meritocracy.

Discussions of medals also appear later, as the women's park event was set to begin. This was the first of the two park events as was again introduced by JJ Chalmers in the studio and Tim Warwood, who is standing at the side of the Ariake Urban Sports Park. We hear from the pair: '*The other reason*

we've got to be excited about is that we've got British interest in this today, Bombette Martin in the 1ˢᵗ heat and Sky Brown in the 3ʳᵈ, what can we expect from both of them?' (Chalmers, event commentary); '*Well let's start with Bombette, brilliant skateboarder, she won the British Championships, she's qualified for these Games, and I've chatted to the team manager and actually for her, still only 15 years of age, just to be here is brilliant for her. This is definitely for her a confidence builder and looking ahead to Paris 2024. But in Sky Brown, we've got a genuine medal contender, she's just phenomenal*' (Warwood, event commentary). Firstly, for Chalmers, the potential for British medal success is a key driver for being excited about the event, and so returning to the point that in this case skateboarding is an activity based on meritocracy and the push for success. In response, Warwood furthers this by shifting focus away from Bombette Martin to Sky Brown, and how she has the 'genuine' potential to gain a medal for Britain. This is understood in this exchange as a key part of her identity.

Importantly, while it can be argued that a focus on the nation is not a 'traditional' neoliberal trait, since classically, neoliberalism is predicated on an open and competitive international market system characterised by flows of goods and people (Davies, 2014). However, the framing of the event here by Chalmers emphasises the embedded Olympic nationalism and the collection of nations as individual teams as they appear in competition with one another. They can thus be considered a product of the neoliberalised form of sport that the Olympic so represents, in which athletes and teams are reduced to individual competitive units. First, the festivalisation of international competition and goodwill are inherently economic decisions, with the IOC attempting to reach as large an audience as possible (Boykoff, 2014). This links the commercial incentives of the producers of the Olympics with the pastiche tastes of the Olympic consumer in a spectacle of nationalistic representation (Real, 1996). This facilitates the construction of national identity, creating a sense of membership, similarity, and equality. Athletes thus become symbolic warriors, defending the honour of their nation, throwing them into competition with others (Blain, 2002). Within the neoliberal sports system then, the symbol of the nation is mobilised as an individualised and competitive game piece, with the Games becoming a playing field for competition between individual athletes and teams.

By emphasising the excitement of British medal potential then, the presenters are pushing the competitive nature of the skateboarding events to the forefront, further reinforcing the concept of 'competition' as a key feature within skateboarding. Likewise, Warwood's discussion of Bombette Martin reinforces the competitive ethos' imbued in skateboarding at the Olympics. He notes how whilst she may not have the potential to gain a medal like Sky Brown, these Games serve as an

important steppingstone in her career as an athlete, both readying her physically and mentally for a chance to obtain a medal in the Paris 2024 Games. Whilst her competitive edge isn't so clear in this case, her potential to build on this is, further building concepts of 'training', 'dedication', all working towards 'performance maximisation'. As mentioned in the literature review, sports under neoliberalism constantly touts the benefits of long-term dedication and training in order to dominate opponents (Sheppard, 2019), and so this comment marks Martin's beginning of this journey. Moreover, in both comments, the focus on Martin and Brown as athletic individuals is intensified rather than all participants as part of the wider skateboarding community, locating these individuals outside of their usual context.

5.3.2: Elements of Strategisation

Going back to the introduction to the men's street competitions, the audience receives some elaboration on how these medals will be achieved, highlighting the strategies and decision-making processes embedded in this task. As we cut from JJ and the studio to a view of the Ariake urban sports park and the voices of Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill, the two commentators note whilst giving a brief description of the event format and scoring system that: '*The more tricks you do the more scores you're gunna get on the board, but you've only got a small amount of time to get those done*' before continuing '*use of course is an important category, but the course is absolutely vast here and these guys will be working through strategies, timing tricks and timing distances to make sure that they can make the most of every single element of this course*' (Leigh, event commentary). Similarly then, whilst these are not unusual comments to make for sporting events, they firstly serve to present skateboarding alongside a system in which the athletes able to land the most tricks in the short space of time available are the ones that will be rewarded most, showing again how 'quantification' and 'meritocracy' are important parts of skateboarding. Secondly, Leigh notes how individual athletes will carefully calculate where on the course they will go, what tricks they will do and how many of these they can do within the allotted time, all whilst making strategic decisions about how these will impact their score in order to maximise their potential. This thus returns to the concept of 'rationalisation', with participants planning out ways of achieving their highest scores.

As shown in Chapter 4, noting the strategies Lee (interview D) explained, this is something that the skaters actually do in practice both before and during competitions. In many cases, this consists of designing their runs with their national team coaches and altering them in-situ during the event depending on what tricks they themselves and other competitors have or haven't landed. It is not that this statement is untrue then, but it nevertheless works to symbolically link skateboarding to a

rationalised and strategic mode of performance. Indeed, as Spence (2015) notes, due to the competitive nature of neoliberal capitalism, individuals are encouraged to ensure all action is productive as possible in order to maximise their potential. These comments thus connect skateboarding to such a way of seeing the world. Skateboarding becomes conceptualised alongside such rationalised characteristics, drawing attention to the individual decisions that the skaters will have to make as a consequence of the competition.

The previous section showed the format of the skateboarding events at the Olympics served to transform skateboarding into a competitive sport, with technical decisions being made that create an environment in which the athletes must calculate their actions and work under pressure created by the Games' emphasis on domination and success. This section develops this, showing how skateboarding then becomes presented alongside discourses that match and reinforce the taken-for-granted nature of competition within these circumstances. Here, the use of media personnel such as presenters and commentators serve as a supplement to the competitive format of the event. They introduce neoliberal sport concepts through explanations of the event and by drawing attention to the excitement imbued within its competition. They note the individuals to look out for and skateboarding's meritocratic and competitive structure. The introduction of skateboarding and the athletes here by Chalmers, Warwood, and the commentators furthers this by verbally confirming and reinforcing skateboarding's status as a competitive sport as well as maintaining a commitment to the supremacy of the individual. On top of this, the two commentators, Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill offer an explanation of skateboarding that draws on neoliberalised understandings of success, rationalisation, individual decision making, and domination over others. The concepts they introduce by doing so then work to make a group of statements that then present this as the norm for the Olympic audience.

5.4: Commentary on the Athletes

This section examines in closer detail the commentary of the athletes during the skateboarding events, using Foucauldian discourse analysis to draw attention to the framing of the participating skateboarders as neoliberalised subjects, narrativised through discourses of individualised competition. Throughout the event, the commentators produced narratives of individual productivity and self-improvement. As well as this, there were stories of rivalry and competition and rational decision making. Attention was also drawn to pushing the limits of the body, highlighting moments in which extreme feats of endurance are displayed. The goal then was clearly to emphasise the drama of

the event and is thereby tied to the goal-orientated characteristics of elite competitive sport, in which the participants' thoughts and actions are said to embody competitive reason, giving them a clear purpose and meanings that are consistent with the basic tenants of neoliberal ideology. From here, I will show the multiple ways that this happened throughout the Tokyo 2020 Olympic skateboarding events.

5.4.1: Narrativising the Competition: Creating Stories through a Competitive Framework

Throughout the event, the commentators work to turn the competition into a narrativised chronicle. They frequently comment on the skaters' scores and positions on the scoreboard as well as commenting on the success or pressure that they may be facing. This is a product of skateboarding being presented in a competitive format to a large audience, but it also serves to restate the competitive ethos of what is happening on screen, telling the story of the event and the skateboarders' actions through the competitive format that it is embedded in. During Felipe Gustavo's 1st run in the 1st men's street heat for example, he is awarded an 8.49 and Ed Leigh (event commentary) comments: '*That's a really good score, I think he's gunna be sitting very comfortable going forward now cus he's got that base layer, and it's ready to be built upon*'. Comments such as this remind the audience that what the skaters are doing here is ultimately for the purpose of competing with one another to get the best score. As well as this, it creates a temporal sense of progression throughout the event, referring to what Gustavo has just done, and how this will affect his future in the competition. The use of building metaphors likewise emphasises this sense of constant progression. Importantly, the use of the temporal here serves to emphasise the need to plan rationally ahead, thinking in the privatised sense of how to improve one's own competitive circumstances, and indeed the need to do so successfully, putting them ahead of the other skaters and securing a place in the finals. This theme is returned to during Vincent Milou's second best trick attempt, in which he is successful in landing a high scoring trick: '*In the prelims that's the name of the game, you've got to be able to start building. He's got a great foundation and now he can really start pushing and trying to cement that place in the finals*' (Leigh, event commentary). In this sense, Milou's action is similarly situated in the neoliberal context of constantly pursuing one's own interests in order to be successful, conceptualising the skateboarding occurring during the event as a goal-orientated and rational activity.

In addition, and fitting with the Olympic format and competitive sports more generally, the 'goal orientated' nature of the event is made clear through the quantification of the skateboarder's runs and tricks. For example: '*Okay 8.25 coming out there for Vincent Milou*' (Leigh, event commentary),

'*Yeah just sitting under Jagger Eaton on 8.58 and in second Felippe on 8.49. Very early days though*' (Churchill, event commentary). This frames the actions of the skateboarders as something that can be systematically measured, giving an economic measure of success and failure in the event. From there, these measurements are used to effectively tell the story of the competition, namely how the skateboarders are all ranking against one another. The participants' scores are summarised in this way at the end of each round throughout each of the events, with any changes in leader board positions being highlighted, which works again to emphasise the temporal nature of the event and how the skateboarders are in competition with one another at all times. These comments thus locate skateboarding in the goal-orientated nature of neoliberal sports in which teams and athletes become resemblant of rational and competing specialist firms, rather than realise the internal enjoyment and creativity inherent to sport (Beamish, 2009). Concepts are introduced into the practice that render it a goal-orientated 'productive activity', requiring 'rationalisation'. These are then worked into the creation of temporal and competitive narratives that are used to present skateboarding in neoliberalised terms.

5.4.2: Competition for First Place in the Women's Park Final

Another example of emphasising the competitive nature of the event occurred during the woman's park finals, where the commentators dramatised the competition for the podium positions between Sky Brown, Sakura Yosozumi, Misugu Okamoto and Kokona Hiraki. In this case, their actions are neoliberalised through the narritivisation of their battle. Firstly, as the commentators were introducing the 8 finalists: '*Then it's those heavy hitters. At first glance you've gotta say that the medals will be shared out amongst those top four, the three Japanese and Sky Brown*' (Leigh, event commentary). So straight away the four girls are singled out from the rest of the participants due to their high skill level. From there, after Kokona's first run we hear: '*You've gotta say that it's the one hole in Kokona's runs at the moment is the lack of that 540, if you're gunna compare it to Sky, Sakura, and Misugu, so 58.05, she is within 2 points of Sakura Yosozumi at the top of the standings. This is gunna start getting very tight*' (Leigh, event commentary). This comment firstly invites the audience to compare the four skaters on grounds of the points they have so far obtained, whilst at the same time noting how Hiraki's run is missing the 540 that would allow her to achieve a higher score, essentially quantifying the tricks within the run and reinforcing the idea that the higher, faster, and more skilful skateboarding is the best and most rewarding form of skating.

Figure 10: Starting order of the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding women's park final. Source: Screenshot of BBC television broadcast (4th August 2021).

Shortly after, just before Brown drops in for her first run, we hear: '*Pressure is on, she knows she's in a final now*' (Leigh, event commentary). The pressure here of course comes from the competition with the other three aforementioned participants. The focus on pressure returns when Brown fails to land a potentially high-scoring trick during the first run: '*But critically it puts the pressure on her now. Everything was there but just didn't get the catch on that flip indy*' (Churchill, event commentary). Again, this reinforces the need to land the most technical, and therefore best, tricks in order to thrive in the competition whilst also noting the consequences of failure, resulting in a loss of competitive edge. Following this, moving into Misugu Okamoto's first run there is a similar comment: '*Missing the varial out onto the flatbank, that's quite interesting because that's one of her tricks. Maybe this pressure of sitting out in front and watching that 60.09 coming in from Sakura, could have just put a dent in the amour*' (Churchill, event commentary). In the same way, this comment serves to emphasise the pressure the skaters are facing. The narrative during the Women's Park finals thus starts to become one of the four women undertaking a quest for self-expression of their individual merit and therefore the beating of their opponents through a personalised and pressurised struggle. The frequent references to the pressure serve to make the event emotionally relatable and exciting for the audience, yet they also neoliberalise the story of the event by framing it through such competitive lines.

As the final continues and the four women begin to get more scores as they complete their runs, the commentators begin to use these scores to narrate the competition once again. For example, during Hiraki's second run: '*59.04, not quite enough to overhaul Sakura Yosozumi but there is yet more daylight between Kokona Hiraki and this women, Sky Brown*' (Leigh, event commentary). The

camera then cuts to Sky and she drops in for her second run: '*47.37, a tiny bit lower, still in bronze medal position but that is almost guaranteed to be gone if this women can land her run, 13 year old Misugu Okamoto*' (Churchill, event commentary). Okamoto then drops in, and fails an attempt at a high scoring trick: '*Heartbreak as the knees slip out, she knows that was gold slipping through her fingers. 53.58, so Sky Brown slips into fourth and it's a Japanese lockout on the podium after the first two runs*' (Leigh, event commentary).

Finally, during the third and final runs, the commentators begin with: '*These are the final four skaters left to drop, Sky Brown, Misugu Okamoto, Kokona Hiraki and Sakura Yosozumi. These four skaters were always, on paper, gunna share the medals out and that is the way it's turned out in the finals*' (Leigh, event commentary). So again, the commentators are grouping these four skaters together in terms of their competitive ability, reinforcing the focus on success and meritocracy in line with the goal-orientated quest for medals. Then moving to Hiraki's third run in which she doesn't manage to improve her high score of 59.04 we hear: '*She is not guaranteed a medal yet, she is sat in silver medal position, but the quality left to drop still*' (Leigh, event commentary). The camera then cuts to Sky: '*Sky Brown, 13 years old, won X Games less than a month ago, she came 2nd behind Okamoto in the Dew Tour in Des Moines, she hasn't yet got a run down, she needs to shake out the nerves and land this one*' (Leigh, event commentary). During the run, she lands, a very high scoring trick and completes her run in full for the first time, '*56.47, you can see what it means to Sky Brown to land that run. So, bronze medal position behind Sakurua Yosozumi and Kokona Hiraki, but Misugu Okamoto, the woman who has dominated the last two years of competition is still to drop and she is in fourth place, that bronze is far from guaranteed*' (Leigh, event commentary). Towards the end of the competition then, the narrative becomes one that is goal orientated in terms of achieving medal positions, with each skater under pressure to land their run and gain a podium position.

Finally, Okamoto drops in and misses the last trick on her run, and so the medal positions have been decided: '*So great, Britain has its first ever skateboarding medal, Sky Brown will take Bronze. Kokona Hiraki will take silver and Sakura Yosozumi will take gold*' (Leigh, event commentary). It is comments such as this last one, in which medals are routinely mentioned, and as in other Olympic sports, that conflate skateboarding with the Olympic competitive sport ethos. Ultimately then, the actions of the four women become framed through neoliberalised concepts of competition. A progressive, dramatised and competitive narrative is constructed by the commentators that is constantly building to a climactic moment of someone besting all of their opponents and winning. There is a start, middle and end that showcases the individual struggles that each participant is facing and the strategies they are using to overcome them and their opponent. Firstly, the concept of 'elite performance' is

returned to through the singling out and continued focus on the technically best skateboarders in the final. From there, we then see the re-affirming of 'quantification' through repeated mentions of their scores, as well as 'success and failure' through referrals to medals, who is likely to win out of the four and the emotions that the athletes are facing because of this. The creation of such narratives then, serves to further locate skateboarding in the neoliberalised context of contemporary sport.

5.4.3: Framing Yuto Horigome and Nyjah Huston as Rivals in the Men's Street Competitions

During the men's street finals, there was an important story being constructed about Nyjah Huston and Yuto Horigome, characterising them as ongoing rivals over the past 5 years or so, being almost evenly matched and constantly battling each other for first place in previous competitions, and especially so in the Olympic Games. This sub-section thus examines the way the pair are characterised as rivals by the commentators and the implications this has for the dissemination of market logic.

The framing begins during the second men's street heat, in which Horigome participates. At one point during the heat, the camera cuts to Huston who is sitting in the audience stands since he is not participating in this heat and Ed Leigh (event commentary) begins: '*And we get our first glimpse of the man who is gunna be stamping his authority, or looking to stamp his authority on this course. Nyjah Huston, absolutely dominated street skateboarding in the last 6 years. He has finished either 1st or 2nd in the street league standings. I don't think there is another person in the world that has dominated their sport so consummately for so long. And that is the man who will have the target on his back today*'. Here then, Huston becomes characterised as a top performer in competitive skateboarding, noting his history of podium finishes that mean he has 'dominated' the sport in recent years. Conflating Huston's identity with that of the elite sports criteria of dominating others, drawing attention to his ability as an individual (Morissette, 2014). As a result, his primary goal is said to be to '*stamp his authority*', meaning his goal is to beat all others in the competition. Huston then consequently becomes the primary individual that people will be most hoping to beat in the competition.

From there, during Horigome's first run, Ed Leigh comments: '*Yuto Horigome, current world champion after Rome at the end of June, he took down Nyjah Huston there, those two have been locked in a real battle throughout the qualifying process since Street League in London in 2019. That world ranking says number two, I think it should say 1.5 next to Nyjah. There is very little to split these two and it's going to be a titanic battle today*'. In the same way as Huston then, Horigome's identity becomes framed as an individual with real competitive edge, matching that of Huston's. This is done

by bringing in historical context, with Leigh noting how Horigome previously defeated Huston and gained the world champion title, and since being locked in fierce competition throughout the Olympic qualification process, resulting in what will be a heavy battle at the day's competition. This thus serves to contextualise the current competition by drawing on previous competition results between both Horigome and Huston, using this data to single the two out from the other skaters participating in the Olympics, placing emphasis specifically on the battle between the two of them that starts with Horigome's first run. As Harvey (2007) writes, under neoliberalism, social relations become organised through competition, defining relations between individuals as interactions that take place in a competitive marketplace. Here, Huston and Horigome's relationship mirrors this, with the pair being framed as two competitive individuals that are historically locked in battle with one another, and will once more be attempting to best one another.

Later, after a fall by Horigome during the best trick section of his heat, he ends on an overall score of 33.75 and we hear: '*I think Nyjah Huston will be watching these and rubbing his hands, I think he'll feel like he's got these prelims where he wants them*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*Yeah I think he's looking and going, you know what, it's not looking as hard for me to get through now*' (Leigh, event commentary). Here, Huston's thought process is framed as if he is specifically working to beat Horigome and is in a better position to do so now. Seconds after this, the final scoreboard is shown on screen and Ed Leigh begins talking through the scoreboard and the current rankings, noting '*Yuto Horigome, one of the serious medal hopes and the current nemesis of Nyjah Huston is in 4th*'. This final comment serves to once more reinforce Huston and Horigome's relationship as one defined by market relations, in which they are linked only by their competition rankings.

So far, through the narrativisation of Huston and Horigome, the commentators have restated the concept of 'elite performance', bringing Huston's previous competitive success into the framing of the event. The commentators then note that the goal is to beat him, reinforcing this. Historical context of Huston and Horigome's previous competition appearances is then drawn on to create a concept of 'rivalry', furthered by the framing of their actions as attempts to best one another, casting skateboarding as a 'productive activity' in which 'performance maximisation' is key. As the prelim competitions end, and the final begins, in which both Horigome and Huston participate, the commentators continue to frame Horigome and Huston in this way. Before Horigome's first run during the finals, the camera cuts to him looking nervous: '*Yuto Horigome really struggled in the prelims, he's been battling Nyjah Huston over the course of the last two years, now is the chance to take him down on the biggest stage, what's he got?*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*It's the body*

language that we're seeing from him, the frustration, the lack of enjoyment in his skating, he's usually so measured and precise and I'm not getting that feeling from him today' (Churchill, event commentary). Here the commentators dramatise the event in a few ways, once more using the pair's battle outside of the Olympics over the last two years whilst noting that the Olympics are '*the biggest stage*' within this ongoing battle that has now led to a climactic moment for the pair. The rhetorical '*what's he got?*' is then used to add to the audience's anticipation but also highlights how his next attempt is important for competitive reasons since it is a chance to beat Huston despite Horigome's prelims struggle. In addition, the mentioning of these struggles works to reinforce the individual physical and mental exertion needed to succeed.

Later in the finals, the commentators use Horigome's scores to show how he is dominating the competition just as he begins to drop in for a third best trick attempt: '*He's currently 9.35, 9.30, a 6.77 and an 8.02, if he ditches that 6.77 with this score,* [Horigome lands a trick] *which he does, then he's pushed up, a 9.50, massive, 35.9, and the Tokyo local moves into a very dominant position with his 4th best trick attempt, the pressure is on now*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*And you know what, having put that down, do you think he's gunna be like okay I'm doing well so I've gotta go crazy on the last trick*' (Churchill, event commentary); '*He's gunna watch what Nyjah does*' (Leigh, event commentary). Firstly then, Horigome's story now becomes one of dominating his opponents due to his high scores, with added pressure to maintain that position in hope of winning a medal. Following this, Ed Leigh notes how before deciding what trick he will attempt for his next turn, he will pay attention to what Huston attempts, and make a decision based on besting his rival.

Whilst the narrative between Horigome and Huston is similar to the above framing of the four women skateboarders, the commentators this time make use of much historical data, such as previous contest results, and podium positions to contextualise what is happening in the present moment. This establishes a fluid sense of temporality to the event, creating a narrative that continues through time (Barnfield, 2013), in this case including both the Olympic event but also skateboarding events outside of this. This temporality is used in a way that the two skaters are framed as arch-competitors. Their relationship to one another becomes defined solely through market relations, in which both athletes' worth is measured in quantifiable terms that are located within a competitive format that requires they must work to best one another. As for the concepts that this works to introduce in the finals, references to Horigome's composure hints at his desire to beat Huston and show how climactic a moment this is, reinforcing 'rivalry' as a driving force of his participation. The mentions of Horigome's current scores use 'quantification' to show how critical his next move is,

meaning these metrics become the basis on which to act, requiring 'rationalisation' and 'performance maximisation'. The use of past and present information here is important in this process, showing that throughout recent years both Huston and Horigome have been locked in competition this way, so their rival status does not exist only in this event, but has defined all of their recent competitive activity.

Within this framing, the commentators make use of other classic neoliberal sport tropes such as the skaters' current scores, emphasising how their actions are done for external and calculable goals, with decisions made as to how best to achieve these. By conceptualising the event in this way, statements are produced that neoliberalise the actions and identities of Huston and Horigome by drawing on both the present moment and wider historical information. Lastly, the intensity and longevity of the rivalry that is presented serves to relay discourses of both physical and mental exertion and the individual determination needed to overcome such struggles.

5.4.4: Narrativising and Framing Individual Skateboarders

This next sub-section looks at how the athletes are discussed by the commentators during the events using individualised, productive narratives, in which individual stories are constructed that showcase each athlete's strength, determination, rational thinking and ability to push the limits of their body against obstacles of injury and pressure, or indeed their failure to do any of these. Throughout, the skaters are weaved into wider personalised stories that frame the current event and are tied to the goal-orientated ontology of elite sport. The nuance here is thus on the stories constructed about individual skaters and the explanations of their individual quests found within Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill's commentary of the event, whereas the two sections above have shown how in other cases participants have been given joint narratives that emphasise the relations and rivalries between them.

An early example of this occurs in the case of Canadian skateboarder Micky Papa's performance during the first men's street prelims. Firstly, as he is about to drop in for his first run, we hear: '*Micky is one of those guys that used the gap we have had due to COVID very well, you could basically see him training, learning all those tricks to flip in and flip out and it's been amazing to watch*' (Leigh, event commentary). Instantly then, he is introduced as a dedicated athlete, productively training for the event, despite the difficulties caused by onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he falls during his first run: '*That fall has cost him very dear then and it's all on his next six* [attempts]. H*e's got the number of the beast* [6.66] *for his first score, a bit of work to do*' (Leigh, event commentary). This gives the impression that Papa's first run was not good enough in quantifiable terms, and now he is left

with improvements to make if he wishes to succeed. Following this, he achieves a 5.50 for his second run and the commentators make similar remarks about the need for improvement. In this instance, Papa is introduced as goal-orientated and dedicated, whilst the commentators remark on his need to achieve individual and measurable success.

The competition then moves into the best trick section, and after Papa's first attempt, we hear: '*Micky Papa in desperate need of a score here*' (Leigh, event commentary). Papa then lands a high-scoring trick: '*And you can see how much that means to him, he was right under the pump there, he needed that score and when it matters he was able to turn it on*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*And we're beginning to see the joy of this format kick in*' (Churchill, event commentary). Here then, we return to Papa's need to improve, but this time successfully doing so, with Leigh drawing attention specifically to his success and how crucially it was needed in this moment of pressure. In this case, the commentators also mention the format of the event, which re-draws attention to the fact that Papa is in a competitive environment, in which the format requires individuals to push through the pressure they are facing and constantly try to achieve the highest score possible. His ability to '*turn it on*' in these moments thus makes for a successful sports person.

During Papa's second best trick attempt the commentators note: '*Micky Papa, he's got a 9 but getting dragged down slightly by those run scores, let's see if he can start pulling up his bootstraps*' (Churchill, event commentary); '*Micky Papa has now got no slack, he's got three tricks left to go and he's got one 9, if he wants to drop the 5.9 and the 6.6, if you wanna make the finals, you can't have those kind of scores*' (Leigh, event commentary). At this point, Papa has reached a decisive moment in his competition performance. He must exert himself if he is to reach the finals. Papa does land some more high scoring tricks during this section after these comments but ultimately does not score enough to make it into the finals. Throughout Papa's performance in both sections of the prelim then, the commentators created an individualised story, chronicling Papa's individual quest for self-expression and victory in a competitive environment, acting as a metaphor for neoliberalised ways of life as explained above. Here, Papa'a actions become interpreted and explained to the audience through market logics that are a result of the environment he is situated in. These explanations firstly draw on neoliberalised concepts of 'resilience', showing how the most tenacious and adaptable individuals are the ones that deserve merit. This is done through their praise of Papa for training despite the ongoing adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic and later returned to through his apparent ability to excel in moments of pressure. However, due to his missed attempts during the event, the commentators then re-introduce 'success' and 'failure', highlighting how these are individual traits

and something that can be quickly measured and compared with others, serving to rank all individuals against one another. As a result of discussing Papa's actions in this way, he becomes a medium through which such ideological messages can be transmitted.

As well as Papa's individualised story, there were also some notable examples of other participants' determination, pushing their bodies and overcoming injuries in order to achieve success, returning to such ideas of 'resilience'. During the women's street finals for example, the commentators discuss Margielyn Didal's performance and injury at the end of her first run: '*2.33 there for Margielyn Didal. She's hobbling off there carrying a couple of knocks from prelims to get her here*' (Leigh, event commentary). Then, during her first best trick attempt: '*going for that frontside nosegrind, just touching the truck on the way out. Really struggling with that injury now, as we progress through, is she going to be able to keep that at bay?*' (Churchill, event commentary). As Sheppard (2019) writes, contemporary sports tout the power of those willing to shed blood, sweat and tears in pursuit of being number one. It becomes the operating logic of the sports, hierarchising victory as the ultimate and only worthwhile experience, therefore reifying a capitalist, competitive logic that one should win at all costs. The most superior and dedicated are rewarded by putting their bodies on the line in gruelling bouts of athletic contest (*Ibid.*). In this sense, the commentators repeated focus on Didal's individual ability to push through her injury during the event reinforces this logic, showing the need to win at all costs. Importantly, the rhetorical will she '*be able to keep that at bay?*' is a technique used to add anticipation to the event, dramatizing it further, but also making her struggle the key part of her performance at the event.

A similar theme emerges from the commentators' discussion of Aori Nishimura during the same finals: '*She fell on her penultimate trick in the prelims and she hobbled away, they put ice on her knee, she was able to skate and got that last trick in and that's what got her into the finals, but do you think that's taking its toll now, do you think that two hours for her since she's skated, and that's starting to stiffen up a bit*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*Yeah unless she had that ice the whole time that's two hours of swelling that's gunna be going in there, it might not hurt so much but it's gunna reduce mobility*' (Churchill, event commentary). Then, during her 2nd best trick attempt, where she attempts a trick and falls: '*Foot placement as she got onto the rail was wrong wasn't it. That backfoot, just drifting over and again you can see her hobbling, the cost of prelims, how hard they had to skate to get in the final*' (Leigh, event commentary). This is a similar discussion of injury then, with an emphasis on the physical cost that the skaters must undergo during the competition, and how this can affect their competitive performance. Firstly, she is shown to have been through an intense struggle to get

into the final, with the injury affecting her in the prelims and now carrying over to the finals. Leigh's framing of this as '*the cost of prelims*' specifically characterises this injury as a natural outcome of attempting to reach success. From this viewpoint, the participants must exert themselves and risk injury if they wish to succeed and so Nishimura becomes conceptualised through a win-at-all-costs idea of 'resilience' in which one must continue despite difficulty and adversary. In this case, attention is drawn to Nishimura's failure as a result of the injury, characterising her as unable to stand the exertion of the competition and therefore becoming unable to achieve victory. 'Failure' thus emerges as a key concept here, showing how those that lack to ability to absorb and overcome obstacles are left behind. Indeed, in neoliberal society, those that have the least competitive edge are those that are rewarded the least (Spence, 2015).

In this case, through the commentary of the event, the skateboarders' individual actions become neoliberalised through competitive understandings of productivity and resilience. Papa is shown to have been training for the competition, productively maximising his chance of winning, but ultimately fails after much struggle and exertion. As well as this, Didal is framed as struggling through physical injury, whilst Nishimura's performance is used to further the need to do so as a taken-for-granted norm in competitive sport. In the latter case, we also see how failure is characterised as a lack to stand the pressure and risk of such competition, with sanctions being given through low points. These are all metaphors for life under neoliberalism, which requires individuals to push and exert themselves, distinguishing themselves from others in a market society (Spence, 2015). In this case, the classic tenants of neoliberal sport that make it so appealing, including the drama and attention to participant struggles and emotions, all work to reinforce this. Neoliberal discourses are worked through individual actions, whilst their outcomes are discussed in measurable terms of success and failure.

5.5: Moments of Rupture

As argued in Section 2.3 of the literature review, as neoliberal ideas become increasingly prevalent throughout the social realm in ways such as those shown above, alternative forms of organisation become more difficult to imagine and enact (Harvey, 2007). However, within this supposedly all-encompassing terrain, pockets of resilience to this process can be found. Resilience here refers to the strategies of endurance adopted by communities and individuals to continue their everyday life despite ongoing systems of oppression (Katz, 2004). Whilst they do not offer a direct push back to these systems such as resistance would entail, they do offer examples of communities coming

together to make their own histories through small acts of coping with everyday realities. Such examples thus show possibilities for alternative forms of organisation that are not organised by injustice, producing their own subjectivities, spatialities, and temporalities (Grove and Chandler, 2017). In the case of sport and physical activity, it is the case that many practices give hopeful examples of alternative ways of being through resilience to the individualising forces of neoliberalism and its effects on sport. Skateboarding is one example of these, and has been frequently cited as offering alternatives to capitalist and neoliberal ways of life (Cantin-Brault, 2015; Borden, 2019a).

This occurs in skateboarding through its practitioners' culturally specific realisations of jouissance, characterised here as the positive emotions associated with participation. On one hand, participation in contemporary sport is neoliberalised, ultimately defining how enjoyment is experienced (Pringle, 2015a). Whilst participants in such sports may indeed enjoy their efforts, they are nevertheless bound up in 'the sport ethic' (Hughes and Coakley, 1991), made up of neoliberalised positive norms such as sacrifice for the game, seeking distinction from others, taking risks and challenging limits. On the other hand, however, skateboarders reach jouissance through contrasting means. Its practitioners are rarely in competition with one another, instead seeking to achieve little aside from the enjoyment and thrills of creativity and movement, as well as join others in a like-minded community (Borden, 2019a; Schwier and Kilberth, 2019; O'Connor, 2020). It is through these shared participatory and performative components that are built around 'doing it' that drive skateboarding, as well as characterise its resilience.

Whilst I have argued above that skateboarding's televised coverage of the events at the Olympic Games is an example of how it is being presented as a competitive sport, with neoliberal discourse worked throughout its practice, it is also the case that some of skateboarding's 'alternative' cultural characteristics make many appearances during the coverage, offering moments of counter-discourse. Indeed, as discussed in Section 3.3.3 of the methodology, an issue with discourse analyses of any kind can is the potential to make broad claims of social phenomena and dominance that downplays the everyday lives of those within communities that are said to be affected by these (Smith and Sparkes, 2005). As the current format of sports event framings serves to individualise its participants, in many cases participants can showcase power and solidarity with one another, destabilising this overarching narrative (Caldwell, 2020).

During analysis of the skateboarding events then, critical attention was also paid to the gestures and languages made by the participants themselves, in the form of their verbal and non-verbal

interactions with one another, as well as moments in the live commentary. Together, these reveal moments during the coverage in which skateboarding's realisation of jouissance through the triumph of process over product and comradery are encountered, despite the dominant sporting system in which they are situated within. As a result, skateboarders show their own motivations, characteristics and interpretations of skateboarding that do not straightforwardly conform to the Olympic hyper-competitive model of sport. Indeed, from the beginning of skateboarding's inclusion into the Games, both participating athletes, professional, skate media companies, and everyday skateboarders, have all noted the importance of representing skateboarding correctly at the Olympic Games, so the showcasing of skateboarding's core values is important to many skateboarders.

5.5.1: Process over Product

Firstly, throughout the competition, the inherent joy and the feelings of excitement and stoke within skateboarding were visible through the visuals, commentary, and interviews with the athletes themselves. These were also noticeable in the run-up to the Games. On July 23rd 2021, for example, before the Olympics began, World Skate (2021) posted a video on YouTube entitled *Olympic Skateboarding and What it Means*, which features many of the Olympic skateboarders that were giving their thoughts on skateboarding's debut appearance. Included was Sky Brown, who mentioned '*the thing I'm probably looking forward to the most is skating with all the girls at the park, it's really cool, I'm so happy and stoked*'. This was followed by Andy Anderson, saying he wants '*to help people see that skateboarding is fun, and can be artistic, and you don't need to be so good that you need to make it to the Olympics, you can just have fun with it*'. My argument here then is that skateboarding's appearance at the Games actively challenges neoliberal sport's demand that physical activity must be rational and equate to some external product. Instead, it is simply about having fun yourself and with others.

It is these small but frequent expressions, emblematic of the cultural subjectivities found within skateboarding, that highlight the counter-discourses that skateboarding, and its practitioners can create through their realisations of jouissance. At the end of the men's street final for example, BBC correspondent Tim Warwood, quickly interviewed Vincent Milou, who came fourth in the final. Here, Vincent noted that '*I wanted to land my run but it doesn't always go as planned but you know, I had a lot of fun and it was a great experience and that's all that matters. It's just a great family, I'm stoked for the top three, I'm on the fourth spot, it doesn't matter, I had fun*'. Here, there is a clear conceptualisation of skateboarding as something that is 'fun', and is built around 'community', with

Milou's disregard of which place he came in, mentions of the family feel and placing his experience of the event above all else.

   This joy was visually shown and verbally explained on multiple occasions, showing that skateboarding does not have to be 'serious' despite appearing even at one of the world's biggest sporting events. During the beginning of the women's park final for example, as the participants were being introduced by the commentators in turn, the camera panned to Bryce Wettstein and she was shown smiling and playing her ukulele on the course. As well as this, during the men's street prelims, Jagger Eaton was shown with earphones in, bobbing his head and scrolling on his mobile phone seconds before he dropped in for his run, to which BBC studio host JJ Chalmers later comments: '*he's got his earphones in, he's just absolutely living his best life*'. Lastly, at the end of Andy Anderson's run in the men's park prelims, he continued to perform a short 'freestyle' routine, a type of skateboarding that is excluded from contemporary elite competitive skateboarding, and at the grassroots has attachments of fun, silliness, and lack of seriousness. Moments like these are all reminders that the skateboarders are for the most part there to skate first and compete with one another second. They introduce a concept of 'playfullness' into skateboarding, showing that competition is not the sole reason for their participation. This is reinforced by the multiple skaters throughout the competition, such as the many skaters who continued their runs after the timer had rang, despite the tricks not counting for points and the potential for disqualification, or others like Mariah Duran who actually dropped back in after a failed trick to attempt it again.

   As well as this, the commentators made frequent referral to the emotions of the skateboarders throughout the event. As Ed Leigh and Marc Churchill note during Annie Guglia's second run during the women's street prelims: '*really enjoying herself there*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*looks like a really good vibe on the park there doesn't it*' (Churchill, event commentary); '*gives you that 'ah I wanna be there' feeling*' (Leigh, event commentary). Likewise, after Andria's final best trick attempt in which she lands a front-side nose-slide down the 8-stair hubba during the first women's park prelims: '*she's ecstatic to get that done, I don't think she's done that ever, see the smile on the way out of that, that was amazing to see*' (Churchill, event commentary). Following this, the camera pans to her and you hear her say 'so happy'. '*That's skateboarding right there, put that in a bottle and you've got essence of skateboarding*' (Leigh, event commentary). The way that the commentators here actually mention that experiencing such joy in simply the doing of skateboarding is a key part of its practice. This is important since it helps to frame skateboarding through this lens rather than one based primarily on productive activity.

The commentators also make similar comments about Margeilyn Didal, who, as being introduced alongside the other participants is holding her board high in the air and visibly very hyped up, Ed Leigh begins: '*As you can see there, a massive personality, she's gunna be a joy to watch in these prelims, really getting a good vibe going, look at those smiles*'. Later, as she lands a frontside 5-0 grind on the biggest rail in the skatepark, she had her arms up in the air, smiling, ran round to and hugged her coach and some of the other coaches nearby then did a small dance facing towards the camera: '*Look how pumped she is, said it before but that is the essence of skateboarding right there* **[...]** *Margy's smile after every trick is my favourite thing, the dial on her smile is turned up to 11, just pure joy*' (Leigh, event commentary).

Figure 11: Margeilyn Didal during the Tokyo 2020 women's street heat. Screenshot from the BBC televised coverage (26th July 2021).

In these instances then, the participating skateboarders echo Barthes (1975) understanding of jouissance as something that allows one to remove their socialised self from existing frameworks of constraint. However fleetingly, the participants disregard the competitive framework in which the participants are situated within, enjoying their practice by giving importance to the process of skateboarding over the external product demanded by competition. Firstly, the skateboarders are shown to compose themselves in a more 'playful' manner, with Andy Anderson noting that the main point of skateboarding is to have fun and be creative. Vincent Milou emphasises the family feel and good times he had skating despite missing out on a podium finish, showing the importance of

'community', rather than 'individualism'. Lastly, Leigh saying he wants to be there shows that it is a good time, is 'fun', and can be filled with 'enjoyment'. This is then reinforced by the mentions of the participants smiles and emotions. Rather than a focus on competition then, and its associated concepts of 'pressure', 'performance maximisation' and so on, here we see ways of reimagining the frameworks of modern competitive sport that the Olympics and other events reinforce so strongly. These work together to achieve this recapturing the jouissance of physical movement. They build a set of statements that highlight skateboarding's resilience and how its participants continue their lack of focus on the competitive elements of skateboarding, instead choosing to present to their audiences the alternative characteristics embedded within skate culture.

5.5.2: Comradery

As explained in Section 2.3.6, skateboarders do not just celebrate skateboarding in this way as individuals. Indeed, in other sports, audiences may see or hear notions of jouissance that resonate with the previous subsection. What makes the case of skateboarding so unique then, and truly characterises its resilient potential, is that jouissance is realised in skateboarding through skating with others, rather than against them. At its core, it is about co-option and celebrating one another, regardless of skill level. Key to this is the valuing of collectivity and taking joy in the ability to hang out with a like-minded community. Also important in the Olympic skateboarding events was therefore the comradery shown between participants during the events, with the participants hugging, fist bumping, and cheering each other on despite them being in competition with one another and despite failed attempts during runs and best tricks. Comradery such as that seen here is a rare feature in sport, especially so in such candid ways during competitions. In many sports, viewers more often glimpse heated arguments, light shoves and in some cases heavy violence between players. Where comradery is seen, it is often forced by tradition such as players routinely shaking hands before matches or very fleeting, with glimpses of athletic track runners congratulating one another after a make. In some notable cases, it is even singled out and made into a huge news story, reinforcing these instances as unusual or alien to competitive sport. One such example is when 2021 New York City Marathon runner Jamel Melville was carried across the finish line by a group of runners after he collapsed just a few hundred meters from the finish line (NBC New York, 2021).

In skateboarding events however, and especially so at the Olympic competitions, comradery was a key feature of the entire event. The hosts of the event, JJ Chalmers and Tim Warwood referred to it after the women's park event, the first Olympic skateboarding event to take place: '*The comradery that we saw there, it was like nothing else. We saw Sky Brown in particular running up to put her arms*

around people in the first round let alone when it got to the third run' (Chalmers, studio commentary); '*It's on display for everyone to see just how incredible this sport is and the comradery is rife amongst all of the competitors*' (Warwood, studio commentary). This was later returned to during a conversation between Chalmers and Marc Churchill in the studio: '*Sky Brown was coming up and hugging almost every single one of them as soon as they finished the runs, that is pretty unique*' (Chalmers, studio commentary); '*Yeah, but that's skateboarding. That is throughout every competition whether it's a local thing in your car park or whether it's one of the biggest competitions in the world, and it's good to see the core values of skateboarding surviving through this and being very present. Everybody is rooting for everyone else, and that is unique. Some people think wait a minute they lost but they seem really happy, everybody is really good friends*' (Churchill, studio commentary). In this sense, the concept of 'comradery' becomes a key part of skateboarding, driven by its community ethos and focus on participation. Churchill's comments further this, noting how despite wins or losses are not significant in skateboarding, but instead 'friendship' and 'sympathy are key drivers of the participants' interactions with one another, showing how the earlier traditional neoliberal concepts introduced into the sport become disregarded by the participants. Moreover, during this event, there was also one especially powerful moment following Misugu Okamoto's final run, in which she fails to land a trick. At this point, if she landed, she would likely have won the gold. As she falls back into the bowl, she begins to cry on her exit (highlighting also the negative emotions and stress often associated with such sporting competitions) and a number of the other participants run over, pick her up and carry her away (see figure 12).

Figure 12: Misugu Okamoto being carried out of the bowl during the Tokyo 2020 women's park final. Screenshot from the BBC televised coverage (4th August 2021).

During the women's street finals, there are also similar moments. As the commentators note about Rayssa Leal following her second run: '*She's just been sprinting round this course, giving everyone hi-fives for the last half an hour*' (Leigh, event commentary); '*She's just out there, and like someone could*

put down the best trick that someone's ever done and she'd just be like 'woooo, I'm having a great time" (Churchill, event commentary). Later, following her final best trick attempt Leal receives a hug and an audible '*proud of you'* from Didal. Another notable moment during the final is when Funa Nakayama lands a high scoring trick during the best trick section just after Momiji lands a trick that gets her a high score. This leads to the commentators saying: '*Using that energy from Mishima*' (Churchill, event commentary); '*This is how sessions work in skateboarding, you use that collective energy to flow and that's what we wanna see at this end of the final, inspiring each other with these tricks*' (Leigh, event commentary). This comment shows that 'empathy', 'community' and 'shared experiences' are key concepts in skateboarding, with the participants hyping each other up and bouncing off one another with the tricks that they are trying, rather than simply attempting to overcome one another with these tricks, despite being in the final of the Olympics.

Lastly, during the men's park final, we see more similar moments. After Keegan Palmer's first second run for example, in which he achieves a 95.83 score, Pedro Barros drops in and falls after a few tricks in, exiting the bowl and then hugging Keegan. As Ed Leigh then comments: '*Look how stoked he is for Keegan Palmer, that is skateboarding right there'*. Then, following Luis Francisco's final run, which was the final run of the event, meaning Keegan won the gold medal, the camera cuts to a canopy at the side of the skatepark, showing Keegan and Cory Juneau with their arms around each other jumping and shouting in excitement. Marc Churchill then comments: '*That's so good to see, that is the core values of skateboarding, everybody is so hyped that anybody made anything*'. Moments like this show to the audience that these skaters are not simply in competition with one another as demanded by the system in which they are situated in, but in many ways are also there to have fun with their fellow skateboarders. It doesn't matter what tricks people did or didn't land, but everyone is just excited that they all get to skate. As JJ Chalmers and Tim Warwood close the event, they sum it up as thus: '*You talk about the pressure, they don't show it, but they must be feeling it to some degree but having said that, every time, we've talked about this at every single session, they're so happy for one another, I just cannot get over how special this culture is*' (Chalmers, studio commentary); '*It really is and you're not seeing anything different to what you would normally see, and I think that's the one thing that hopefully comes across is that this wasn't Olympic skateboarding, it was skateboarding just happens to be at the Olympics, this is just what happens and its nothing short of brilliant. And it's a bit weird that these guys are fighting for medals, yet they are so quick to congratulate each other*' (Warwood, studio commentary).

Figure 13: Pedro Barros and Keegan Palmer hugging during the Tokyo 2020 skateboarding men's park final. Screenshot from the BBC televised coverage (5th August 2021).

Through these realisations of jouissance then, the participants are again introducing a set of concepts into the event that show a type of skateboarding that is not built around competition, rivalries and quests for excellence, but is instead formed of 'community', 'comradery', 'sympathy', 'collective experience' and so on, all of which are undercut by the individualising forces of neoliberalism. Rather than emphasising the competitive aspects of the skateboarding event, the skateboarders across the events are constantly displaying positive emotions through cheering each other and supporting one another despite the competition. Meanwhile, the commentators were constantly reinforcing this, noting how this is a core part of skate culture. In this sense, a set of statements are given that focus on community building and a skate with rather than against ethos. As such, the participants show resilience to neoliberal sport's dominant emphasis on strict competition and individualisation. Here, the skateboarders are acting in ways that maintain skate culture's most important parts. The female participants carrying Misugu Okamoto after her fall, for example, or Keegan Palmer and Cory's Juneau excited embrace after the final run of the men's park, are all significant moments, showing that the skateboarders were at the Olympics to enjoy their time as a collective, rather than competing individuals. This is a clear glimpse of an alternative existence, moving outside the confines of contemporary elite sport, and showing that sport does not have to entail individualised competition, rationalisation, and productivity, but can be done for the purpose of participation and the joys of coming together and community.

5.6: Conclusion

Televised sports broadcasts are not politically neutral. Such practices of communication have transformed the meanings of sport, giving importance to some characteristics whilst rendering others less significant. This ultimately produces ideological constructions of sport, in which certain forms of sport are given greater merit in society (Liao and Markula, 2009). As Barnfield (2013: 329) furthers,

'the form of the broadcast is central to how it is perceived, understood and incorporated by viewers'. Such sport broadcasts do not simply mirror neoliberal logic then, but actively reinforce it through the production, reproduction, and dissemination of discourses that sustain such a way of understanding sport. Due to the international ubiquity of sport and sport media, this goes beyond simply sustaining dominant ways of doing sport, extending to maintaining systems of domination more generally, characterising sport as a mode of neoliberal governmentality (Coakley, 2011a; Cole et al., 2004; Miller, 2009). Here, certain codes, systems and procedures are constituted through 'the order of discourse', a conceptual space in which knowledge is formed and produced, certain practices and understandings become dominant, and the limits of possibility are thereby constructed (Hook, 2001; Lazzarato, 2009).

Skateboarding however, does not fit with the neoliberal characteristics of contemporary sport. Instead, skateboarders make use of space in creative and original ways with little intention other than fun and self-actualisation (Borden, 2019a). As Cantin-Braut (2019) therefore argues, skateboarding is closer to an art form than it is an Olympic sport. However, the Olympics' emphasis on rule-bound and quantifiable practices of sport renders the spontaneity and creativity inherent to art impossible, meaning skateboarding must be made to fit the Olympic format.

To this end, skateboarding as an Olympic sport and spectator product must thus be framed in such a way that it fits with neoliberal sport. This is achieved through the use of discourse; a particular way of conceptualising language. As before, language here refers not only to written text or spoken word, but can also include visual images, body language and other semiotic forms (Fairclough, 2006). Such language is key to rendering certain concepts more or less important in any given practice, designating the practice as a set field of knowledge. Through the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis, I have shown how this occurred in Olympic skateboarding during the BBC's televised broadcasts of the event.

Firstly, this included an event format that creates a competitive and pressurised environment. This then becomes reinforced by the commentators' comments on how the participants must constantly exert themselves due to the environment they find themselves in, naturalising competition as an unavoidable and taken-for-granted aspect. Secondly, the presentation of skateboarding in line with the Olympics' focus on medal success and winning as the ultimate goal load skateboarding with neoliberal rationalities of meritocracy and success. Finally, the athletes themselves are similarly neoliberalised during the event, with attention being drawn to their apparent commitments to

constant progression, with goal-orientated and strategic planning taking place alongside their ability (or not) to push themselves to the limit and ultimately overcome all rivals. The participants' actions are thus said to embody competitive reason. They think and act in ways consistent with neoliberal ideology within a circumstance that marks their social relations as one based on neoliberalised conceptions of competition. The athletes thus perform as neoliberal subjects, contextualised by neoliberal ways of life and complicit with its ideology. Together, these introduce concepts into skateboarding such as 'quantification', 'rationalisation', 'performance maximisation', 'rivalry', 'productivity' and 'success and failure'. These then work together as an individualisable group of statements that create a mode of discourse around Olympic skateboarding. They state that skateboarding is something practiced in line with these concepts. As such, Olympic skateboarding is constituted as a specific theoretical formation, in other words as a shared field of knowledge with specifically defined practices and meanings (Liao and Markula, 2009). In this sense, sport broadcasts are thus performative since they actively participate in the creation of a specific sport event whilst relaying the norms and discourses inherent to them in the contemporary moment (Morissette, 2014).

Following the genealogical element of this analysis, these discourses must be linked to the wider social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are situated, in turn revealing the relations of power therein (Foucault, 1977; 1978). Building on Chapter 4 then, it is my contention that these are inherently neoliberal discourses, based on individualised competition, rational decision making, performance evaluation and meritocracy. The narratives created throughout the event are thus informed by and constitutive of wider power relations of neoliberalism throughout everyday life. From this perspective, sport broadcasts are another form of localised knowledge at which discourses and produced, working as a channel of power through which the realms of everyday life become increasingly neoliberalised.

On the other hand, through their performance at the Games, the participating skateboarders showed hopeful examples of resilience to the flattening tendencies of neoliberal sport, denying that social relations must be organised through competition. Instead, through their performances of jouissance throughout the event, the participants showed how the defining characteristics of their practice are firstly the triumph of process over product, but crucially a collective appreciation of this aspect and of one another. In this way, the participants show how skateboarders do not conceptualise skateboarding in line with neoliberal sport, instead designating skateboarding as a field of knowledge and understanding in which 'comradery', 'friendship' 'shared experience' and 'enjoyment' are all key part, leading to a vastly different theoretical formation of the practice than

that given by the Olympics' attempt at framing. Indeed, the reason for conducting genealogical research is to understand where sites of power are located, but by understanding their formations and workings, to also be able to identify alternatives to them (Foucault, 1978).

Through an introduction of these discourses, skateboarders can be seen to remove themselves from the constraints of neoliberal sport, realising the transgressive potential of jouissance (Barthes, 1975). Echoing Lombard (2010) then, skateboarding is resilient in the face of pressures of commercialisation and commodification. By doing so, they exemplify Newman's (2014) contention that jouissance in sport still holds its political potential, allowing us to imagine new pathways for sport that are not centred around the economically generative. In this way, it offers counter-discourses that both managers and fans of sport can learn from, showcasing alternative ways of coming together and celebrating physical movement and community. This presents another genealogical construct. Rather than working to reinforce the prevalence of neoliberalism, skateboarding can instead be constitutive of more egalitarian ways of social organisation, hinting towards alternative futures that are not bounded by the current neoliberal context. From here then, the next chapter now turns to an examination of how these discourses affect and relate to the spaces of grassroots skateboarding, showing how the processes of neoliberalisation and resilience play out the wider world of skateboarding.

6: Practising Neoliberal Sport? Neoliberalism and Resilience within Grassroots Skateboarding

6.1: Introduction

This final analytical chapter shifts the focus away from skateboarding's elite and institutional level to its grassroots, showing the relationship that a variety of grassroots organisations and skateboarders have with skateboarding's newly obtained status as an Olympic sport. So far in this thesis, the neoliberalisation of skateboarding has been analysed through the lens of Foucault's concept of governmentality. Chapter 4 showed how this process has played out firstly through the governmental and organisational formalities that are required when a new sport enters the Olympic Games, working at the institutional level to neoliberalise skateboarding. Since neoliberal policies and practices such as these work to generate the environments in which market-based systems of 'objective truth' can be produced and disseminated, this marks the metaphorical first step in the process of neoliberal governmentality as it plays out through skateboarding' inclusion into the Games. Chapter 5 then showed the type of events that this fostered, in turn relaying neoliberal discourses of competition, individualism, productivity, success, and failure. Following on from these two then, this chapter looks at how these emerging discourses transform the grassroots of skateboarding, drawing attention to the types of knowledge and practices that this creates.

Within the process of skateboarding's neoliberalisation however, counter-discourses are emerging from skateboarding's resilient qualities. As mentioned in Section 2.3.6, resilience poses an opportunity to disregard neoliberal discourses of individualisation, calculative practice, and self-responsibility. It shows creative and generative strategies of adaptation that allow communities to preserve their lifestyles and practices despite ongoing oppression by dominant systems (MacLeavy et al., 2021). In Chapter 5, the participating skateboarders at the Tokyo 2020 events showed how skateboarding's embedded aspects of jouissance can remain despite being included in the world's largest sporting competition. These come from skateboarders' awareness of and strong commitment to the lifestyles and cultures of skateboarding (Schweer, 2019; O'Connor, 2020). Although rather than there being some pre-determined, fixed set of values that one automatically embodies when stepping on a skateboard, it is such that these come into being through the practice of skateboarding and careful negotiation of its cultures and meanings (Borden, 2019a). Indeed, skateboarders frequently communicate with one another, instructing each other in skateboarding's core values and seeking to

maintain them in the face of its ongoing commercialisation (Yochim, 2010). In this way, they are situated and emergent, located within the spaces and practices of skateboarding, hence their reappearance at the Tokyo Games.

It is at the grassroots where we can most strongly see these processes playing out, since it is here, through the act of skateboarding and skaters' interactions with one another that these values and norms are constantly produced, reinforced, and negotiated (O'Connor, 2020). As Borden (2019a) writes, skateboarding has separated itself from traditional organised sport and is more independently creative and irrational in its organisation. As a result, and as mentioned in Section 2.3.1, the term 'skate culture' has emerged largely uncontested amongst professional and everyday practitioners, uniting millions across the globe and serving to capture the more culture and lifestyle driven elements that are so important to skateboarders. It is through this lens of skate culture that skateboarders choose to organise themselves (O'Connor, 2020), foregrounding participation, expression, satisfaction, and community over wealth, winning and status (Borden, 2019a). Indeed, for Lombard (2010), skateboarding can provide examples of 'indigenous governance', which emerges from the everyday life of subjects rather than imposed from the outside. As Anderson (2017b) argues, through an attention to such spaces, we can find examples for other subversive futures, generating new ways of being and doing.

Whilst neoliberal sport works to define its practices in terms of individualised competition, it is the case that skateboarders are taking matters into their own hands, showing emergent and alternative ways of being that are not organised through neoliberal subjectivities. As such, it is my contention that as a result of skateboarders' critical awareness and understanding of their culture, they are responding to the Olympic Games in such a way that works importantly to *maintain* skate culture and its emphasis on process over product and comradery. This highlights once more the resilience that skateboarders can show to processes of neoliberalisation, allowing a greater realisation of alternative ways of organising movement-based practices, centred more around community and co-operation. In this sense, this chapter shows that neoliberalism is not a top-down process, but is one filled with struggle and negotiation 'on the ground' in which pockets of creativity, resilience, and optimism can be found.

In order to examine this, the chapter is split into the following analytical sections:

- Section 6.3 deals with three British grassroots skateboarding NPSOs: The organisations are first introduced. I then use in-depth interviews (Section 3.2) to show how these organisations are having to attach themselves to a neoliberalised narrative of skateboarding as a method to achieve their goals.

- Section 6.4 shows elements of resilience to this process, bringing attention to the ways in which these NPSOs are working to maintain what they understand to be the most important values of skateboarding.

- Section 6.5 makes use of an interview with the founder of a skater-owned brand Death Skateboards, showing how they position the brand in relation to the Olympic Games. It explains how the brand are using their understanding of skateboarding to show resilience towards its neoliberalisation through their sponsorship and media practices.

- Section 6.6 begins the ethnographic portion of research as outlined in Section 3.5. It is split into two subsections. 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 use autoethnographic notes to return to how grassroots practices of skateboarding are susceptible to neoliberalisation, but also how they show resilience through their culturally specific realisations of jouissance. 6.4.2 then uses a mixture of informal interviews with everyday skateboarders in various skateparks, skate spots and following viewings of the Olympic skateboarding events. These work together to give the perspectives of 'everyday skateboarders' on the Games and situate their practices within the circumstances of skateboarding's inclusion.

Overall, this chapter captures a wide range of stakeholders at the grassroots level. As outlined in the methodology (Chapter 3), the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic posed some challenges since many skateparks were closed in line with social distancing measurements; and this also made it impossible to meet others at skate spots. Moments in which ethnography was possible were thus initially few and far between, although this became easier as restrictions relaxed. In addition, the study area was limited to my nearby surroundings.

6.2: Introducing the Grassroots Non-for-Profit Sport Organisations

Three UK-based NPSOs were interviewed, namely Skate Nottingham, Skate Southampton, and Skate Manchester. These all formed around a similar time and have very similar goals. All three aim to use skateboarding as a tool to achieve wider benefits such as physical and mental wellbeing, education, community interaction and engagement, and to offer opportunities to disadvantaged individuals and

communities. They are all run by skateboarders and position themselves as community development organisations that hope to contribute to the development of their respective cities, adopting a 'by and for skaters' stance to raise the profile of skateboarding and create more useable, active, and inclusive urban spaces.

Skate Nottingham describe themselves as a 'community development organisation established to raise the profile of skateboarding as a healthy and creative activity, generating opportunities for local young people and adults to help transform Nottingham's social and cultural development' (Skate Nottingham, 2020; *np*). The organisation is committed to making Nottingham a 'skate-friendly' city in a similar way that cities like Malmö and Tampere are attempting. For them, a skate-friendly city refers to more than simply the city providing a skatepark, but is instead about centring youth and sports through a deliberate partnership between the city and user community to unlock the wider social and cultural benefits that this can lead to. Skate Nottingham thus works with the local government, as well as other community groups and funders to deliver competitions, jams, demos, and a range of inclusive skate sessions aimed at girls, LGBTQ+ members and racial and ethnic minorities at a variety of age and skill levels (Neil, Interview F). Their projects also capture extensions of skateboarding culture and interests such as film, photography, architecture, and community organisation. In 2019 for example, Skate Nottingham held the 'Skateboarding in the City' festival from 26th July to 3rd August, which included 9 days of skateboarding related events across Nottingham, including skate photography exhibitions, free entry jam-sessions for under 16s, LGBTQ+ members, women and girls, and 'veterans', academic discussions and public talks on skateboarding's potential for urban transformation and edit making competitions, filmed across Nottingham at temporarily installed skateable spaces as well as the city more generally.

Skate Southampton came into formal existence in 2017, during which the Southampton city council were attempting to ban skateboarding from the Guildhall Square on the grounds of it being a public nuisance to the area. The organisation thus formed as a way for skateboarders to effectively challenge this and was successful in doing so. Since, the organisation has developed its aims along a similar path to Skate Nottingham, championing the creation of inclusive skate spaces in their city as well as attempting to kickstart the renovation of existing skateboarding facilities whilst engaging with local councils, organisations, and funders with hope to make Southampton a skate-friendly city. All of this is done in line with a goal to further participation equality in skateboarding in terms of age, gender, and economic background and therefore use skateboarding as a tool to create a more vibrant, safe, and inclusive city (Skate Southampton, 2019). They do not see promoting Olympic

skateboarding or developing Olympic level skaters as part of their aim, and like Skate Nottingham, Skate Southampton also regularly include extensions of skate culture such as fashion, music, film and photography in their events (Sam, Interview G). Their previous events include the annual 'SLAMMA', held in Guildhall Square, featuring skate competitions, jams, and exhibitions in the local John Hansard Gallery.

Skate Manchester was formed in 2019 and so it is the most recently formed of the three organisations. It was formed after some of the members returned to Manchester from the most recent *Pushing Boarders* event held from 14th to 18th August 2019 in Malmö (a conference dedicated to the social impact of skateboarding worldwide). Skate Manchester was created from a recognition of the need for collective organisation in Manchester in order to facilitate better relationships between local skateboarders and the council, helping to voice concerns such as a lack of free-to-use undercover skateable spaces and ultimately work towards helping Manchester become a skate-friendly city. It also aims to facilitate a broader and more inclusive participant range, helping those who have previously experienced barriers to skateboarding. The organisation understands itself as working at the grassroots of Manchester skateboarding, and argues for the importance of being able to skate in city space for wider skate culture, helping to preserve its DIY and urban roots, as well as assisting in its inclusivity (Kayleigh, Interview H). To date, Skate Manchester have organised inclusive skateboarding sessions at the Moss Side Community Park, and began a crowd funded project to host a free-to-access skate space in Stretford Mall, designed towards skateboarders of all levels. They also keep to local skate community up to date on important events such as the six week consultation regarding the former Central Retail Park (4th January – 14th February), now home to the DIY spot Gooseside (Skate Manchester, *nd(a))* Overall, their primary aims include 'raising awareness of the positive impacts and benefits of skateboarding' and 'developing effective collaborations to ensure skateboarders' inclusion in future and existing public spaces' (Skate Manchester, *nd(b): np*).

Together then, these organisations have a strong commitment to the development and longevity of grassroots skateboarding. They hope to further its acceptance in urban space due to the possibilities it can create in terms of inclusivity and creating more liveable spaces, as well as maintain skateboarding's focus on grassroots and community participation whilst also working to further its commitments to inclusivity through the hosting of events aimed towards those underrepresented in skateboarding. These organisations are thus led by what they perceive to be values that skateboarding represents, using its ethos' of collectivity and creativity, and with a focus on its grassroots and DIY origins. Additionally, there is an awareness of the multiplicity of skateboarding and

its many interpretations, providing a platform for artistic elements of skate culture such as photography and video, as well as providing spaces to discuss its purpose and potential. In many ways then, these characteristics are in tension with the emphasis that the Olympic Games places on individualism and elite performance, as well as its flattening of subjective arrangements in favour of quantification and ranking. As the next section will show however, these three organisations are being affected by the discourses that Olympic skateboarding creates, and the type of knowledges around sport that these produce, having to attach themselves to the neoliberal sporting narratives that the Games serves to perpetuate in attempt to gain greater validation from local urban managers. As I will show, this is an example of neoliberal sport's capacity for governmentality and creating systems of truth.

6.3: Using the Olympic Games as Leverage

Firstly, it is important to re-mention Skateboard GB's stance on grassroots skateboarding. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Skateboard GB are in clear support of the creation and maintenance of skateable spaces within the city and developing skateboarding communities, providing them with the knowledge, tools and support they need to thrive. This was apparent in interview with David (interview C), but is also evidenced through their Skateboard Facility Guidance document. Whilst this document is mainly aimed towards authorities and planners, offering guidance for best practices for procurement of skateparks, it mentions how it is also 'necessary to facilitate the provision of not just skateparks, but also skateable public spaces in our towns and cities, by which we mean public spaces which positively welcome and cater for a diversity of uses and people, including skateboarding and skateboarders', listing examples of cities that have done this well, including Tampere, Malmö, Melbourne, Paris, Glasgow, and more (Skateboard GB, 2020: 35). For Skateboard GB, the Olympics will play an important part in enabling the work of local organisations that strive to create such spaces, since it means local authorities will take them more seriously, with the Olympics essentially working as a badge of legitimacy for skateboarding. It is this sentiment that highlights how the discourses and knowledges that modern sport disseminate work to neoliberalise sport, with sport only being understood as worthwhile if it fits the standard commercialised and competitive format.

6.3.1: Skate Nottingham

For Skate Nottingham, the Olympics is already having such an effect. In line with Skateboard GB's hopes, Neil (interview F) mentioned that the Olympics has become *'a kind of strategic lever to get a foot in the door with the council you know "new Olympic sport skateboarding, i.e., take us a bit more*

seriously"'. Straight away then, there is a situation in which to be sufficiently understood and acknowledged by urban managers, skateboarding needed to be an Olympic sport. This has now developed into a situation where the Olympics is almost intrinsic to Skate Nottingham's interaction with their local council. As Neil (interview F) mentioned, *'almost every engagement we have with the city council reminds them that it's going to be in the Olympics'.* This is also the case for any publicity pieces that the organisation put out: *'almost every press release we do in Skate Nottingham starts off with some reference to the Olympics as I guess everyone does'.*

Attaching themselves to the neoliberal sport format in this way has been beneficial to Skate Nottingham then since it allows them to position the organisation as in line with the stance of the neoliberal city more generally. As Neil (interview F) noted in regard to attempting to gain funding from their municipality government for their events and exhibitions, their social purpose *'alone wouldn't turn the head of our municipality, their area in interest in terms of what we have do in marketing the city, a city that is a sporting city, and the Olympics sits in that'*. Indeed, as John and McDonald (2020) have written, elite sport is often used by governments as a strategy of urban entrepreneurship, with funding being channelled into elite sports in an attempt to present cities as liveable, creative, productive, and ultimately more attractive to capital investment. Here then, Skate Nottingham are being directed by the discourses that surround neoliberal sport, having to align aligning themselves with the Olympics due to the status it brings to skateboarding, and show that it has some rational and productive purpose in the grand scheme of the neoliberal city.

As well as strategically using the Olympic Games to gain legitimacy from urban managers, the neoliberal connotations of the Games are also important for gaining legitimacy in terms of media coverage. As Neil (interview F) noted, Nottingham resident Alex Halford's position on as one of five skaters on the Skateboard GB team has been used in this way. As Neil (interview F) explained, *'if we want to get something published in the BBC national website or, we would have to get an Alex quote in there. And they will want to talk to Alex, otherwise it just won't fly'*. This is a similar point to the above then, about a need to position skateboarding in line with competitive sport discourse, with Skate Nottingham having to leverage Halford's Olympic athlete status to gain media coverage. Here however, the nuance speaks to the ways in which modern sport provides a 'terrain on which the ideological elements of competitive individualism can be worked through' (Whannel, 2008: 98).

From a mainstream public media standpoint then, there is no point covering Nottingham skateboarding without reference to this competitive individualism, reinforcing sport's competitive antagonisms of 'individual versus individual, team versus team, nation versus nation' (Sheppard, 2019: 268), rather than the wider social benefits of skateboarding and the various ethical and moral actions of Skate Nottingham. Instead, Halford becomes a vessel through which heroic stories of determination and success can be worked, ultimately reinforcing the neoliberalised logic of Olympic skateboarding (Morissette, 2014). Indeed, in BBC's (2019c; *np*) article covering the Skate Nottingham's Skateboarding in the City festival, the festival is positioned as something that will 'raise the profile of skateboarding ahead of it becoming an Olympic sport in 2020', first mentioning how Alex Halford and Carl Shipman are among those who benefitted from the city's skate culture before a final, and very brief point on how skateboarding can create liveable spaces in the city. The benefits of skate culture are thus seen to be ones based around competitive performance, whereby skateboarding has created space for these two individuals to maximise their ability. This is in contrast to the benefits that skateboarding can have in terms of creating community-driven spaces (Borden, 2019a; 2019b).

6.3.2: Skate Southampton

Similarly, Sam (interview G) also noted how they have begun to use the Olympic Games as a platform to start conversations around skateboarding, community development, inclusivity, and creativity, and how its inclusion into the Games gives the organisation '*a better place on the table to be listened to*' whereas before they '*were still fighting to bring skateboarding out of the shadows*'. In this sense then, prior to skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, local managers were less interested in skateboarding. This viewpoint is clear within the city administration since the city attempted to ban skateboarders from Guildhall Square in 2017 on the grounds of economic and public image costs (Carroll, 2017). Furthering this point, Sam (interview G) mentioned, that this is '*because it's actually seen as a sport from those people who are not involved in skateboarding*'. This is intrinsically tied to current knowledges about sport, since '*being in the Olympics gives it that kind of banner when people who dismiss it suddenly think "ah okay, this isn't just big kids on toys, this must be something proper so let's have that conversation"*'. So to be seen as productive, it needs to be an Olympic sport, whereas before it may have been understood as a useless, childish nuisance. This understanding of skateboarding disconnects the practice from its roots in creativity, play and enjoyment, and instead centres its purpose around performance for productive and competitive outcomes. In other words then, skateboarding in Southampton needs to be tied in some way to a

system of sport that is based upon purpose, competition, and meritocracy for it to be taken seriously by its urban management.

6.3.3: Skate Manchester

Lastly, as for Skate Manchester, the main two institutions that the organisation were interacting with at the time of interview were the city council and Stretford Mall. Here, Kayleigh (interview H) noted that skateboarding's presence in the Olympics similarly works as a strategic lever in both of these interactions, however also thought that this may not have been so necessary with the Mall managers as it were with the council, since the Mall seemed more understanding. Nevertheless, Kayleigh (interview H) noted that '*I've probably lost count of the amount of times I've written something along the lines of "due to skateboarding's participation in the Olympics, there is a need for more facilities and more access to facilities, and so on"*'. For Kayleigh (interview H), this is because '*the fact that skateboarding is entering into the Olympics is a really strong message and there is some legitimisation around that and that's actually the thing we're buying into*'. Similarly, as the examples above then, there is an understanding that adhering to the elite sports narrative aids in Skate Manchester's legitimacy as a sport organisation. In this case, it is skateboarding's status as an Olympic sport that drives the requirement for skateboarding facilities meaning its wider community development benefits become side lined, secondary to its increase in popularity due to the Olympics.

Again, this fits with the city's requirements for '*something that's measurable*' (Kayleigh, interview H). On one level Skate Manchester use skateboarding's potential to generate Olympic athletes to show this. As Kayleigh (interview H) notes: '*so if we want Manchester to sort of breed skateboarders that would contribute to the Olympics, if we want to have that kind of track, then the city to some extent or publics to the city have to invest in that process*'. In this way, skateboarding is positioned as something that can generate a track record of potential Olympic athletes, highlighting a situation in which sports are more worthwhile and sensible investments if they cater to elite performance.

In addition to this, to show measurable impact Skate Manchester are also '*selling skateboarding through that Olympics lens as sort of a healthy activity*' (Kayleigh, interview H). This is because '*if we want to take on a skate space or set something up, you generally need to show some sort of impact. And obviously impact can be measured around physical activity*'. As such, the organisation is attempting to leverage skateboarding's Olympic status to show that it is a beneficial and healthy activity, which translates easily into conversations with the local council since Skate Manchester can use it to articulate arguments in their favour around having an active population and reducing health

costs. Kayleigh (interview H) sums up: '*basically if people are skateboarding, they are undertaking more physical activity, which means that they are gunna be a little bit more healthy, is the sort of idea*'. In this sense then, through the need to emphasise skateboarding's status as an Olympic sport to prove that skateboarding is a healthy and worthwhile activity for the city to invest in, its more qualitative cultural characteristics are reduced to a quantified measure of participants. This then becomes discussed through an economic lens of active populations and cost reduction. The nuance here is slightly different to the examples above, since promoting skateboarding as something that facilitates a healthy lifestyle seems to play a bigger part in Skate Manchester's conversations. However, the organisation is still using skateboarding's Olympic status as a way to prove that it is a productive and therefore worthwile activity.

6.3.4: Skateboarding NPSOs in the Neoliberal Context

As Buckingham (2009) notes, neoliberalism works to normalise market-based approaches across social life, including the voluntary sector. As opportunities for funding decrease and competition increases, NPSOs are pushed to employ corporate-inspired strategies that resonate with market solutions, showing their worth in relevant, systematic, and measurable terms (Costas Batlle et al., 2018). In the context of the neoliberal city, voices that do not contribute to the economic wellbeing of the city are marginalised in favour of those that do (Mould, 2015). As such, NPSOs must align themselves with the goal of the neoliberal city in order to survive, with their actions becoming less and less their choice (Thorpe and Rinehart, 2012).

In line with this then, all three organisations are having to use the newly obtained high-performance sport status of skateboarding as leverage to realise their own aims. In other words, in the neoliberal context, due to how sport is understood through the discourses and knowledges foregrounded by neoliberal governmentality, namely high-performance, professionalisation, competition and productivity (Liao and Markula, 2009; Sheppard, 2019), these organisations need to latch on to this narrative in some way to be taken seriously. To do so, they neoliberalise their approaches to skateboarding and social development. They can then position skateboarding as something that makes sense in the context of and contributes to the neoliberal city, using elite sport to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the city (John and MacDonald, 2020). This is in contrast to skateboarders' understanding of skateboarding as an informal lifestyle-based activity, which is often understood by urban authorities as a public nuisance, becoming expelled from the urban environment on the grounds of being irrational and unproductive (Howell, 2008).

All of these examples speak to the systematic ways that sport is used and managed in the market economy (Sheppard, 2019). In this section, we see how these organisations are attempting to leverage skateboarding through its Olympic status to local authorities to gain legitimacy. We also see how this process plays out in regard to national media coverage. This shows how the dominant neoliberalised understandings of sport are affecting the actions of these three NPSOs. This is not to say that they are nefariously neoliberalising skateboarding, but that the introduction of skateboarding into the Olympics is creating a difficult context in which they must operate that is in tension with their aims. What we are seeing here then is another element of how skateboarding is becoming construed as an object of governmentality following its inclusion into the Olympic Games.

By being included in the IOC's Olympic Games then, skateboarding is now becoming associated with the discourse around neoliberal sports, and this is influencing the operations of skateboarding NPSOs, meaning they have to work with rather than against the individualistic and competitive narratives of the Olympic Games in order to become more relevant to local authorities and national media. Indeed, as Thorpe and Rinehart (2012) write, the connection of an NPSO with their respective sporting culture is important for symbolic capital. This is particularly important in a competitive NGO marketplace. Skateboarding for social benefit is largely at odds with traditionally neoliberal values. Things like empathy, community and teamwork are not readily measurable traits (Costas Batlle et al., 2018), and skateboarders' use of the city goes against the logic of economic production (Borden, 2019a). In other words, this type of skateboarding does not have the cultural capital that its envisioned Olympic counterpart does in a neoliberally dominated world in which sport is mainly defined along competitive terms. As such, whilst these organisations are operating on the grassroots, they are nevertheless caught up in a larger macro context. If governmentality is about defining the limits of possibility then, the Olympic Games can be characterised as a key method of this here since the knowledges it produces set the limits for these NPSOs' actions.

6.4: Resilience in Skateboarding NPSOs

It is important to note however, that this is not a blanket top-down process that guides everything these organisations do or how it is received. Rather, as Williams et al. (2012: 1487) note, what actually happens on the ground is contingent on the interaction of rationalities and technologies on the one hand, and the agency of organisations and individuals on the other. It is in this agency that we see the potential for resilience to the marketizing forces of neoliberalism. As this subsection will show then, in line with skateboarding's resilient qualities, these organisations are adapting to the new

circumstances created by skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, seeking to maintain their grassroots-based and anti-competitive aims through their actions. Their ability to do so comes from a critical awareness of skateboarding's community and lifestyle driven qualities, as well as how the Olympic Games are in tension with this.

6.4.1: Skate Nottingham

As the case of Skate Nottingham shows, there was a reflexive understanding of the situation that the organisation finds itself in. As Neil (interview F) mentioned, '*I strongly believe that skateboarding has been far too elitist*' and therefore '*I am very frustrated that we need to use the elite narrative in order to in order to sell social purpose*', since '*the inclusion, the social purpose discourse is something that we are committed to*'. This frustration and commitment are used productively by the organisation however, and Skateboard Nottingham '*use the narrative of skateboarding being a formalised sport in order to invest in a lot of the positive that we [Skate Nottingham] personally believe comes from it being an informal, lifestyle thing*', whereby they understand '*the Olympics as an ally*', even though '*those things are secondary to any kind of Olympic project*'.

As Neil (interview F) sums up, the approach that they have towards the Olympic is '*a kind of from the rich and gives to the core kind of thing*'. The 'core' here is a reference to core skateboarding, meaning that the organisation essentially want to reap the benefits of the Olympic Games in such a way that strengthens the core of skateboarding. As shown in the run-up to the 2019 Skateboarding in the City festival for example, Skate Nottingham hoped to use its proximity to the Olympics to show '*an authentic celebration of street skating*'. Importantly, there is an emphasis on grassroots skateboarding since '*a lot of the more diverse voices that we want to elevate are not elite skateboarding*', so once more we see how Skate Nottingham understands the Olympic Games as in tension with what they perceive as the core of authentic skateboarding. To this end, they attempted to '*represent the grassroots in a way that we could communicate to the BBC, Nottingham city council, this is what a grassroots event in the UK could look like, that is independent of the Olympics and elevates ordinary people in space without them being elite athletes, and across the spectrum of people's contribution to skateboarding*' (Neil, interview F).

In this sense, Skate Nottingham are working to use the Games to provide a greater platform for skateboarding's more creative, community and participatory based characteristics, showing that participation does not need to be for a competitive purpose and that it also includes creative outputs such as art and design that also contribute to skate culture. As they note, their jams and competitions

are more based around '*incentivising people to have a go, and feeling welcome and feeling confident and valued*'. Likewise, during the festival, they had an exhibition '*that we called Skate and create, we did a load of art and design stuff that was really wedded in authentic skate culture*' (Neil, interview F). Lastly, Skate Nottingham use these multiple facets, that as Willing et al. (2019) note broaden the way that people feel connected more than traditional sports, to '*use skateboarding as a political vehicle to make Nottingham more inclusive*', by '*including LGBTQ+ jams, ethnic and racial minorities, beginners, children*' (Neil, interview F). This is to say then that the organisation's actions are not fully determined by a hegemonic world system, but that there is a process of negotiation and adaptation involved on the ground, with Skate Nottingham not fully committing to the neoliberalisation of sports through its community development aims. In this way, through an awareness of skateboarding's cultural and lifestyle driven qualities, and the ways in which these contrast with the Games, the organisation is adapting to the circumstances created by skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics in a way that seeks to preserve them.

It is thus plausible to say that skateboarding Olympic inclusion is having some positive effects on the organisation, in that the Games have enabled Skate Nottingham to better achieve their goals. Neil (interview F) did note, for example, that '*we will be doing what we were doing with or without the Olympics, but we would probably be less successful at it*'. Likewise, this fits with Grove and Chandler's (2017) notion that within instances of resilience, there is possibility to realise new benefits through the exploitation of new circumstances. Indeed, this has meant that in the neoliberal context, many NPSOs have been able to flourish (Thorpe and Rinehart, 2012).

6.4.2: Skate Southampton

Similarly, with Skate Southampton, there was a reflexive understanding of the Olympics induced context the organisation is now situated in. As Sam mentioned (interview G), '*I would actually much prefer to see 10 new people start skateboarding or 10 who already skate having more fun in more places than see one person from Southampton end up an Olympian*'. So, the organisation still sees its own community development goals as more important and distinct from the Olympic system, highlighting again that the neoliberalisation of skateboarding is not a simple top-down process to which skateboarding NPSOs are blindly accepting. As Sam (interview G) notes, '*what we're trying to do is something very local. For us, it's about trying to give skaters the opportunity locally and making it fun and enjoyable and engaging with so many different people*'. Here then, there is a distinction being made between grassroots local skateboarding and the Olympic Games. This is elaborated on further through explanations of Skate Southampton's events, which have an attention to fun within

skateboarding rather than understanding it as driven by competitive purpose. Sam (interview G) described their flagship SLAMMA event, for example, as '*a contrast to the Olympic kind of official format. Its more about fun and inclusion*', featuring '*a series of fun, stupid challenges*', '*such as best tricks holding hands*', '*best trick bare feet*', which clearly still have competitive elements, but are set up in a fun, more playful and less intense way. As well as this however, and similarly to Skate Nottingham, Skate Southampton also believe that '*that everyone can be part of skateboarding, it's not just all those who go skating, you've got all the art, the fashion, the music, so it can really support that whole culture and really bring people together*' (Sam, interview G). As such, they also use exhibitions and other events to platform these elements of skateboarding, utilising the multiple participants in skate culture to show its diversity and potential for community development.

In order to achieve this then, Skate Southampton are working to create a situation in which any developments in skateboarding in Southampton are skater-led. As they note: '*we want it to be so that any money or attention that comes with the Olympics, we can make sure that that energy and any money is pointing in the right place to have a lasting impact and to be done well*' (Sam, interview G). As such, the case here is that Skate Southampton are attempting to ensure that any benefits that come from the Olympic Games can be filtered into grassroots skateboarding and an overall maintenance of their perceptions of the values and potentials of core skateboarding, namely fun, community, creativity, and diversity. These things are thus positioned as separate to Olympic and elite skateboarding, meaning there is still a clear reluctance against fully neoliberalising their approach to skateboarding.

Despite having to utilise the rhetoric and status of the Olympics to gain legitimacy in terms of organisational capacity, Skate Southampton's activities are directed away from this. Here then, we see resilience through the maintenance of focus on grassroots skateboarding's subjective arrangements. Skate Southampton are thus adapting to the neoliberal context of the Olympic Games by strategically using it to gain legitimacy at the administrative level yet still seeking to preserve what they see as key parts of skateboarding through their on-the-ground actions. As they further, the addition of a specific 'street skateboarding' format has assisted in their goals in some way since '*now we've got this official discipline which is street skating, so that allows you to have conversations about those open spaces like the Guildhall square, outside your shops and people can hopefully be seen not necessarily as trouble makers from official points of a view*', meaning this can be helpful towards '*making the city itself an acceptable playground for skateboarding in the wider sense*' (Sam, interview

G). The SLAMMA event is now also held in the aforementioned Guildhall square, which adds an ironic twist to the skater's battle against the neoliberal city.

6.4.3: Skate Manchester

Lastly, in Kayleigh's case, they (interview H) described the organisation as working '*at the grassroots level, in the growing grass*'. As such, the Olympics is a '*means to an end*', but '*not something that we necessarily fully believe in as a concept*', noting that rather than the promotion of skateboarding's Olympic status being a main goal of that organisation, '*it's more just a way for us to do what we wanna do*', showing similarities to how the other two organisations understood the Olympics as something that is useful but not a narrative that they fully subscribe to or act in line with. Furthering this, whilst one of Skate Manchester's primary arguments is that skateboarding's Olympic status gives value to skateboarding as a healthy physical activity, They felt as though leveraging the elite sports narrative is not necessarily the best way to promote physical activity. As they articulated, '*part of the problem with getting people to be more physically active and to take part in activities is making them feel like they have a worth to be there, that they have confidence in their bodies and so to some extent, elite practice is just not best placed to do that because they are too brilliant*'. Instead, they argued that '*what's gunna keep you practising is a sense of community, a love for it*' (Kayleigh, interview H). This means that 'there are *major important reasons for skateboarding being out in the street, so it is challenging because that's not something that's covered by the Olympics*'. In this sense, Skate Manchester realise that the Olympic Games does not promote what they see to be the values and benefits of grassroots skateboarding. Instead, one of their aims is to encourage a lively and inclusive skate community in the city by creating accessible and free spaces that promote inclusivity and community over elite participation.

As such, there is again an awareness that community is a key part of grassroots skateboarding, being a key reason for practice as opposed to elite participation which can exclude those that are not as proficient in a technical sense. In order to realise this, Skate Manchester place emphasis on skateboarding as it occurs naturally in public space, rather than in elite contexts. Additionally, Kayleigh (interview H) realise that this can be furthered by '*embracing all, like lots of different people and activities that happen in and around skateboarding*', meaning the organisation hope to '*do zine making workshops and that kind of stuff, like art-based activities that are kind of related to skateboarding and talks and discussions as well*'. The organisation is therefore working to maintain skateboarding's community focus and the social and cultural benefits that follow through their understanding and promotion of skateboarding. They are adapting to the changes in discourse

around skateboarding by using the Olympics to better position the organisation in a neoliberal context. They do so whilst maintaining their grassroots and community origins, and continue to highlight skateboarding's diversity and artistic tendencies, rather than the quantified and flattening tendencies of neoliberal sport which serve to erase artistic interpretation from sport practice (Cantin-Brault, 2019). This is thus another example of how grassroots Skateboarding NPSOs are exhibiting resilience to the neoliberalisation of their practice.

6.4.4: Alternatives Exist

Since resilience is a reaction and adaptation to dominant forms however, they do not necessarily change these dominant forms (Katz, 2001). In this sense then, whilst these NPSOs are pushing for the maintenance of skateboarding's core values, it is the case that by continuing to adhere to the elite narrative presented by the Olympic Games, its hegemony and malign effects are still reinforced. Indeed, a governmentality approach recognises that all involved in the use of discourse are intrinsically involved in the reproduction of the genealogical systems such discourse works to create (Foucault, 2008). The issue here is therefore that by becoming associated with the discourse and knowledge around competitive and professional sport, skateboarding is becoming understood by media and authorities outside of its native context. In other words, it is getting taken seriously for the wrong reasons. As Jones et al. (2018) note, community-based sports organisations provide valuable ways for promoting community development and relations across social groups and indeed, it has been shown that skateboarding in the community development contexts can be used to benefit urban communities through promoting socially inclusive and democratic values in terms of race, class, gender and age as well as building capability for collective action (Atencio et al., 2019; Willing et al., 2019). Similarly, Borden (2019b) notes how skateparks can help build friendships, self-confidence, social skills, cooperation and a sense of belonging. Lastly, the Pushing Boarders events in both 2018 and 2019 featured talks on how skateboarding and skateboarders can tackle prejudice, teach transferable skills, increase grassroots capacity, create rich cultural heritage sites and more. These are the things that skateboarding should be taken seriously for before its Olympic status, as its own culture with its own benefits (and disadvantages – there are still many problems within skateboarding such as internal issues of masculinity and whiteness as outlined in Section 2.3.1 of the literature review).

As Liao and Markula (2009) argue then, there is a danger here in that if such an elite and competitive understanding of sport becomes the only true way of knowing about sport, it suppresses other knowledges in the field, meaning that the richer parts of skate culture and its benefits can

become watered down. It is often the case that as NPSOs become further integrated into the neoliberal system and have to compete for funding, the organisations must bend their goals to their funder's desires and devise measurable targets that ultimately lead to a reductive understanding of social impact (Costas Battle et al., 2018). In becoming introduced into the Olympic programme, skateboarding is beginning its dangerous dance with these tensions. In such a context then, explorations of skateboarding's resilience are important as they show how despite such a context, alternative options can still exist. These NPSOs awareness and maintenance of their anti-elite, community-led, participatory and DIY ethos' show how communities can work together to generate alternative futures, challenging the governmental systems of domination that work to produce and distil individualised and competitive subjectivities throughout society.

6.5: Death Skateboards

   This section moves to a case study of a grassroots independent skateboarding manufacturing company, Death Skateboards (hereafter 'Death'). Similarly to the above, I will discuss how Death position themselves in relation to the Olympics, showing a certain understanding of the values that both grassroots, DIY skateboarding, and the Olympic Games serve to represent. It then shows how the company is attempting to maintain these perceived values of grassroots skateboarding despite instances of its commercialisation, such as its inclusion into the Olympic Games, showing how grassroots skate brands can show examples of resilience to such processes.

   Death was founded in Harrow, London by Nick 'Zorlac' Orecchio in 1998, and continues to be owned and run solely by himself. The company manufactures skateboard decks, wheels and branded apparel which can be found in most UK skate stores, both physical and online. The company's distinctive look began with a simple skull and crossbones design that to date remains unchanged and features on the majority of its products. Its skateboard decks are priced at £40 each, which was the industry standard for UK manufacturers around 6 years ago. Since, many other UK brands such as Consolidated or Lovenskate have increased prices to upwards of £55 whilst Death's decks have remained at £40. Like other brands and manufactures, Death has its own Instagram account to which it regularly uploads skateboarding clips and photos of its sponsored riders, and occasionally advertises its new products. As well as this, there is a Death YouTube channel that features semi-regular uploads of short videos of few minutes' length. The company also produces full length videos such as its most recent 'Into the Void' (2019). These likewise feature the company's sponsored riders. *Sidewalk* magazine describes Death as 'a very un-Californian skate brand', staying true to its grassroots origins and not taking itself

too seriously (*Sidewalk*, *nd: np*). Likewise, company owner Orecchio positions Death as a grassroots skate brand that follows its own direction with little goal other than to exist whether skateboarding is popular or not.

Figure 14: Death Skateboards Logo.

As Orecchio (interview I) mentioned regarding skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, '*I don't really care, I know some people are really upset about it, but it's not that different to the X games or other corporate stuff*'. Despite not having any strong feelings towards skateboarding's inclusion into the Games, he does still see the Games as part of the more commercial side of skateboarding. As well as this, he positions Death as in contrast to the Olympic Games. As he later mentioned: '*If they wanted to put the Death logo on the Olympics, part of me would say nah it's not my thing, but part of me also would be like I might have to do it because it would be so funny that this company that's run out of a house in Harrow is now in the Olympics*' (Orecchio, interview I). In this sense, the mentioning of the Olympics being '*not my thing*' show how Orecchio sees the point of Death not as to sell its image or make money through partnership deals and the advertising benefits this brings. Instead, his only reason for putting the Death image on the Olympics would be to mock the corporate Olympic image, since his small independent brand does not fit with the Games' general roster of large-scale partner organisations or the ethos it represents. Positioning Death as an outlier to the Olympics in this

way shows that Orecchio understands Death Skateboards as holding a set of values that do not align with the Olympic Games. In this sense then, we see how skateboarding, whilst not completely separate from neoliberal sport, can once more be critical of and resilient to its flattening forces through practitioners' careful attention to and maintenance of its core ethos'.

6.5.1: Death's Values of Skateboarding

Indeed, whilst skateboarding at the Olympic level works to relay discourses of elite performance and represents the ongoing commercialisation of skateboarding, the case of Death Skateboards shows how on the ground, skateboarding is in many ways resilient to the forces of neoliberal sport through its more irrational forms of organisation and focus on fun. Through an interview with Nick Orecchio, despite skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games, we can see these irrational forms of organisation continue to live on in grassroots skateboarding business. Firstly, as Orecchio (interview I) points out, Death: '*wasn't started to try and be successful in a commercial sense* […] *I don't mind money, you need money, but that's not my main motivation'*. Rather, '*it was just set out as a bit of fun and to do something I believed in'*. He goes as far to note that '*I thought everyone would hate it because in the 90s, skulls were not really in fashion, or that rougher style stuff like hesh stuff'*. As such, the main goal of the company is not to be economically successful, and originally, he thought that the brand would not be popular. In this sense, the company does not connect with traditional neoliberal rationalities of productivity and economic reward, but was instead set up for fun. This is already in contrast to the Olympic Games, whereby the IOC agreed to include skateboarding in the Olympic programme in order to boost the Games' popularity amongst younger audiences, ultimately making it an economic decision.

The notion of '*doing something I believed in'* is important here too, since instead of being guided by economic rationality, it shows that Orecchio has attempted to imbue Death with what he sees as the core values of skateboarding. Instead, as he sums up, the company's approach is '*not being blinkered into saying skateboarding is this thing at this month or year, we just do what we want and that's kind of what we're about'* (Orecchio, interview I). Since Orecchio did not start Death with commercial success as a main goal, he believes this has afforded more creative freedom than if the opposite was true. As he noted: '*if someone wanted to make loads of money from it, they would be like you can't run that graphic or this rider hasn't produced enough footage this year, we need to sell stuff to stores that aren't core skate shops and so on, you might have to go down some roads you don't wanna go down'*. In this way, a lack of desire to pursue solely commercial ends means that there are fewer business led decisions being made, allowing the company to release products or video parts that are

not an attempt at making huge revenues, more following a DIY mindset rather than economic guidelines and allowing Orrechio the space to use Death to express his understanding of skateboarding.

As a result of this greater creative freedom, Orecchio notes that his aim is to try and embody what he perceives as the essence of skateboarding, namely having a good time and doing something for the purpose of simply doing it, which he notes may not be possible if he wished to follow purely commercial ends. As he mentions during the initial stages of Death's development: '*A lot of UK brands were just starting to come up and I kind of felt like they didn't really encapsulate the spirit of what skateboarding was, and I wanted to do something that was a bit like skating, like locking into a grind and it feeling good*'. He elaborates on this spirit through reflections on the past and present background of the company, which, he notes '*is quite important to it, because it forms why I did it*'. He mentions his memory of seeing skateboarders for the first time and '*that they looked like they were having such a good vibe and having fun* […] *and that's what skateboarding is to me, they were just having a laugh. If I'm around people that make me have a really good time, that's one aspect that's the essence of skateboarding to me*' (Orecchio, interview I). Indeed, such notions of community and having fun together are long standing elements of skate culture, whereby skating with someone is more important than skating against them (Beal, 1998).

Whilst many skateboarding brands follow purely commercial ends and make huge economic gains, the case of Death Skateboards shows how skateboarding can work contrary to neoliberal economic rationalities that orientate all human activity towards some productive outcome (Brown, 2018). In this way, Orecchio's brand shows an element of resilience to the neoliberalising forces that reconfigure people into individuals in competition against one another whereby only the most entrepreneurial are successful (*Ibid*.). Instead, Orecchio chooses a style of organisation that is more independently creative of these discourses. Whilst he notes that the brand is not entirely separate from market logic, since he realises the need to generate enough income for the company to be sustainable, it shows an element of resilience through the maintenance of what he understands to be the core values of skateboarding in favour of simply pursuing commercial ends. As I will show from here however, this resilience goes beyond adaptations to the hegemony of neoliberalism in everyday life and extends to skateboarding's inclusion into Olympic Games as well as the wider commercialisation of skateboarding. To do so, I point out two features of Death Skateboards that exemplify this, namely the way that Orecchio choses to sponsor riders and the style of media that the company produces. Importantly, as Orecchio (interview I) noted: '*what we do will stay the same regardless of the*

Olympics. Death wasn't created to follow trends or developments in skateboarding really, it's just about doing what we want to do, which is what skateboarding is about'.

6.5.2: Sponsoring Riders

As mentioned, Death is organised in a way that allows Orecchio to capture what he perceives to be the essence of skateboarding. In elaborating on exactly how he attempts to do so, he references his approach to sponsoring riders. As he explains with Death, *'the riders are not chosen on just ability, it's more like if they capture the essence of what skateboarding is to me'*. This is counter to the Olympic system that demands performance for success' sake, in which being better than others is the primary goal with most competitive performers being rewarded most. Indeed, '*they might not be of the highest ability, but there will be something about their character or whatever that gets me hyped about them*' (Orecchio, interview I). Instead, riders are selected on more subjective criteria whereby they are judged on the lens of them embodying the spirit of skateboarding in their personal character. This contrasts with competitive skateboarding's use of quantified measures of skill.

Elaborating on this further, Orecchio (interview I) uses memories with Death rider Dan Cates. For example, '*when I've hung out with him, or gone on skate trips, I've laughed so much, I'm almost gunna die from laughing too much*'. As well as a focus on having fun, Orecchio also sees a love of participation as a key part of its core values, which as many have written, is a key part of authentic skate culture (Wheaton, 2004; Borden, 2019a; O'Connor, 2020). In relation to another Death rider Eddie Belvedere, he mentions Belvedere is '*hell-bent on just skating as much as he can no matter what. That's another aspect of what skateboarding is to me*'. In this sense, the brand's background is formed in line with Orecchio's understanding of skateboarding's values, namely community, enjoyment, and a love for participation. Such a lack of focus on elite participation and competitive potential disregards the Olympic Games' pedestalling of quests for excellence and quantification of competitive ability that have been shown in the previous analytical chapters.

Unlike the OWSR system then, skateboarders are not placed over one another in terms of technical skill and ability. Likewise, unlike the judging criteria set out by the WSIJP, which is based on how well the skateboarders can perform in a quantifiable sense, there are no set definitions of what makes good or bad skateboarding here, with status being equated with subjective elements of authentic participation (see Chapter 4). As mentioned in both previous analytical chapters, an overt focus on competitive edge and ability in sports works to reinforce the hegemony of neoliberal discourses in everyday life (Coakley, 2011a). The Olympic Games are the ultimate form of this, showcasing the best

and most determined individuals and their stories of success and working to define sport along neoliberal contours. Through a disregard for this then, by choosing riders based on subjective criteria of authentic participation embedded within skateboarding, Death Skateboards shows elements of resilience towards this. Whilst it is not actively changing the systems of sport that the Games works to perpetuate, it shows how participation in sport does not need to be organised alongside competitive criteria.

6.5.3: Producing Media

In line with Death Skateboard's approach to sponsoring riders that are not simply the best skateboarders in a quantifiable or rankable sense then, it follows that the videos that Death produce also set themselves apart from the media that comes from the Olympics and other related competitions such as SLS. As explained in Chapter 5, the media that came from the Olympic Games skateboarding competition serves to present a competitive style of skateboarding, fitting with the need to attract audiences through the production of drama and spectacle. This in turn serves to relay discourses of competitive individualism, highlighting rivalries between individuals, pursuits of success and struggles within this (Morissette, 2014). Whilst many skate videos also showcase the world's top professionals' superior skills to increase brand reputation, fitting in many ways with neoliberal sport media, Death videos maintain a more creative approach. Instead of showing only the team's superior skill, their videos are imbued with elements of skate culture, being based more on creativity, fun and highlighting different and unique approaches to skateboarding. The company's most recent video was *Into the Void* (2019), releasing four years after the process of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics began and one year after the final decision was made.

As Orecchio (interview I) notes, the process of producing a Death video is an organic one, without a specific timeline or plan. '*So one minute, not really thinking about it, then somehow, a few people have got some footage and people are saying to me "Nick, are you gunna make a video?" and I'm like "yeah alright", I kinda go with the flow*'. The process is thus '*kind of rider driven*'. In this way, the media the company produces is set apart from the type of media outlined in the Chapter 5, which is created under economic guidelines. There is no specific time and place such as the Olympic field of play, neither is there a desire to create a profit-driven spectacle as the Games serves to produce. Instead, the purpose of Death videos is '*to try and have a really good time, and just try to document and add to the culture and skateboarding in some way*'. As shown in Chapter 4, features of Olympic skateboarding such as the WSIJP are put in place with the desire to further skateboarding as a sport, serving to push the boundaries of skateboarding on a technical and skilful level, this is a highly

technocratic and neoliberalised understanding of progression. In this case however, the sentiment of adding to skateboarding culture is through showcasing the enjoyment and creativity inherent to its practice. Progression does not have to be organised around constant technical improvement, but can instead be based on a further realisation and celebration of skateboarding as a creative culture.

As Orecchio (interview I) elaborates further, within the videos, the tricks features do not have to be of the highest technical ability, but instead '*we like to see stuff in interesting spots, done differently, something that has that magical feel that makes you excited when you watch it*'. This is made up of '*either something really rad or something really different*' rather than '*the tried and tested formula of flat ground, ledges, a trick on a rail*'. In this sense, there is once again a lack of focus on elite performance, but instead a desire to showcase different styles and approaches to skateboarding. In the Olympic Games, excitement is generated through neoliberalised narratives of competitive individualism that take place of courses designed to push athletes to make impressive displays of ability (Chapter 5). In this case however, Death '*focus on the fun aspect of skateboarding, or skating whacky boards*', or skating in '*really messed up, rough or DIY spots*'. Their approach to creating visual media is clear upon watching any of the full-length Death videos, with riders like Dan Cates, who has a part in each of these using sillier style DIY skateboards, making them out of materials such as shovels, cricket bats, or attaching multiple boards together and then attempting to use these at skateparks and skate spots. As a consequence, Orecchio sees Death videos as a contrast to competitive skateboarding spectator products. As he elaborates: '*I think that* [competitive skateboarding] *has got its place, but I think it comes across as quite corporate for many reasons, and we try to come across as the opposite of that*'. Also involved in this is the production of their videos: '*We try not to overproduce it; we're working with basic equipment and providers that are not that sort of level*'. As he sums up: '*Not only in terms of spots then, but in terms of content, tricks, riders, everything really, music, I just feel like we do stuff our own way*' (Orecchio, interview I).

In comparison to the Olympic skateboarding events, and skateboarding competitions more generally, which follow a similar competition format, and take place in made-for-purpose sites built for impressive manoeuvres such as large stair sets, rails and ramps, Death videos are aimed more at exploring the urban environment and reproducing its spaces through performance. Due to Orecchio's underlying desire to not follow overtly commercial ends with the brand's media, which stands in contrast to the output of neoliberal sport monoliths such as the Olympic Games, Death Skateboards once more shows an example of resilience to the hegemony of this form of sport. Whilst Olympic Media serves to define sports in neoliberalised terms, since they are not based on showcasing the

best or most impressive tricks, Death videos continue to offer alternatives towards this. They recapture skateboarding's celebration of enjoyment, creativity, and difference rather than ones of physical exertion and the need to perform to one's best ability. Overall then, via this case study of Death Skateboards, we see how grassroots skateboarding businesses can continue to uphold skateboarding's core values despite its inclusion into the Games, showing once more how through an attention to their own lifestyles and cultures, skateboarders and skateboarding can be resilient to processes of neoliberalisation.

6.6: Everyday Skateboarders

This final section looks at how everyday skateboarders at the grassroots are relating and responding to the Olympic Games. This is split up into multiple subsections, with the first of these making use of autoethnographic notes, showing my own experiences within my local skateboarding scene in and then later in Deptford, Southeast London. The timeframe covered by these accounts is 2020-2022. During this time, I moved house, hence the change in area. In the passages that follow, there is some skateboarding-specific language used, mainly in the form of trick names, that readers may not be familiar with. A technical understanding of what the tricks are is not important to the flow of the analysis however, and I will make clear the significance of the passages following each one.

6.6.1: Progressing as a Group

Firstly, during the transcribing of the interview with Lee (interview D) that explained the training process for the five funded Team GB skateboarders and the ways in which they calculate percentage use of the course, types of tricks done and so on:

2nd December: As they start talking about collating the data, I start thinking how I could better myself in this way. What parts of the skatepark do I not use so much? Can I start making my lines more spread over the skatepark? This will need me to get over a lot of fears. Also, what tricks do I need to improve on? I think immediately of kickflips over the hip which I used to be able to do consistently but stopped doing once I started doing other tricks. Or fakie nose-slides, or the nollie big spins on the bank which I've both done in the past but never got them fully consistent. From there I start to really want to get out and skate. No one is around but I head down to the park myself. I start practising the tricks I mentioned, trying to get them more consistently.

Following this discussion of how Skateboard GB help their skateboarders improve their skateboarding for competitive purposes, I start to become inspired myself, thinking how I can improve my own skateboarding by using similar methods. Importantly, I actually go and try something similar, working on making my tricks more consistent and adding variety to my trick vocabulary. These are both crucial elements of competitive skateboarding as shown in Chapter 4, so instead of being resilient to neoliberal sport values of competition then, here I become inspired by them. This can thus be read as a deepening of these values within my own skateboarding following skating's inclusion into the Olympic Games. This theme continues on the next day when I am still feeling excited to skate and work on improving my skateboarding:

3rd December: I met Jay at the skatepark today. I explain that I want to start improving my skating, pushing myself more than normal and learning new things. He feels as though he needs to do the same. We talk about how it feels like our skateboarding has been stagnating a bit. We agree to try the rock-fakie on the big quarter pipe for the first time which we both do later. I practise my kickflips over the hip. We also start using the euro-gap, which neither of us do often. I land some new tricks over the gap for the first time later on. I also started using the miniramp in lines. At the end of the session, I say I want to start getting better and getting over fears like the stairs, down-rail etc. and we both agree we should keep trying to improve ourselves.

In this extract, the theme of improving skateboarding is shown again. In this case, during a skate session in which I explained how I want to begin improving my skateboarding, Jay agrees he wants to do the same, so we have a session of trying new tricks in new areas of the skatepark. The notion of our skateboarding stagnating shows how when viewed through the lens of technical improvement, our skateboarding is not progressing, which must be remedied. The desire to improve in a competitive sense is thus working its way further into the skate scene here with another member also becoming inspired by competitive sport tropes of working to improve oneself. This may not have happened, however, should I not have been a researcher working in this area. Nevertheless, whilst it Is knowledge that I would have unlikely gained outside this research, and therefore would not have passed it on to my local skate scene, it shows how such understandings and values of sport can run through and alter practices at the grassroots. Throughout the following months, the feeling of wanting to keep improving my skateboarding continues to return:

6th December: At the skatepark on my own again. Practising kickflips over the hip just going around in a row. I start thinking what new things I can do, and I end up learning front-board to fakie on the ledge.

10th December: Skating today with Jordan and Jay. I decide for my warmups, I'm going to do all of my flat ground tricks at the start of the session to make sure I keep them consistent. I talk about this with everyone and the others agree that they are going to do the same. Jay ollies the two-block for the first time today too. Towards the end of the day, I start trying to get back fakie inward heels on flat ground, another old one that I have lost.

6th Jan: Going to the skatepark with a want to jump down the stairs, I've been thinking about this a lot recently. I used to be able to kickflip them easily, but I haven't done that for years. I've been doing this down the two-block a lot more to build back up to it, the drive to want to improve my skating is really making me excited for it.

In these entries, there is a continuation of the desire for the group to continue to improve our skateboarding, which is continuing to have tangible outcomes in terms of us practising to become more consistent and to learn new things. As the entry for 6th January shows, this has had a long-lasting effects, since the original entry was on 2nd December. As well as this, it shows that the wish to improve and get better is making me excited to skate, underlined by the fact that I will continue to get better.

Sunday 10th Jan: Skatepark with Jay due to social distance measures. We had a fun session, at the start I practised my flat-land tricks like I said I would. I was riding around a lot of the park and going quite fast, just pumping around. I went in with the mindset of getting tricks and trying to get them big. Trying to get higher backside flips over the hip, tre flips too, also trying to get some popped fakie big flips on flat. I did the down rail again today so keeping that up over the last few weeks. In the end though, I didn't land a whole bunch, and felt like I hadn't had a productive session.

The notion of improving comes back in this entry with my desire to keep training my flat ground tricks, as well as attempting to get my tricks higher and faster, also key features of competitive skateboarding scoring systems as shown in Chapter 4. On top of this however, it was a session in which I didn't land as much so it felt like I hadn't been productive in relation to

previous sessions that had seen me trying and landing a lot of new things, as well as improving on things I could already do. In this way, whilst skateboarding is said to be orientated towards normalising failure in contrast to elite sport's traditional emphasis on success, it is the case here that my feelings of lacking in productivity are more aligned with the latter than the former. Overall, these stem from the ongoing measurement of my own performance in ways similar to Skateboard GB's training methods, as well as others in the group doing the same. As such, our skateboarding had become aligned more with the Olympic Games' ethos of competition and performance maximisation. In this sense, skateboarding's resilient qualities seem to weaken, with the Olympics literally changing our skateboarding along more competitive lines rather than us responding to the Games in such a way that maintains skateboarding's core values of community and enjoyment. As the year continued however, these feelings began to fizzle out in the group. Conversations about improving ourselves in this way stopped, and our skating once again became centred on simply enjoying our time skateboarding together. As shown:

February 27th: Looking back, I didn't focus on my inward heels like I said. But I have been practising my flat tricks at the start of every session and they have been getting much more consistent. I haven't had any conversations about improving my skating and thinking systematically for a long time now. This has happened naturally, we just haven't talked or thought about it. Instead we've just been talking about how the weather will start to get better going on from here so we'll be able to skate more enjoyable rather than being freezing every time.

Here we start to see the competitive elements of the group's skateboarding filtering out whilst instead we have just been getting more excited to be able to skate more often and more comfortably. Whilst our skateboarding changed for around two months during the winter, becoming focussed on improving ourselves through practice and dedication, it is the case that it has essentially changed back. As the conversations about being able to skate more due to the improving weather show, the core of this is simply to be able to skate, rather than skate for some productive purpose of improving ourselves. In this sense, despite these changes that occurred within the group as a result of my initial desire to improve myself, these desires collectively fizzled away as we became concerned once more with just the act of skateboarding, showing then how skateboarding's core values of participation and enjoyment are always underlying in the act of skateboarding. In the following months, this theme continued, as did our enjoyment of skating together as a group of friends:

Monday 29ᵗʰ March: I'm sitting doing some writing. The weather is looking good, so I wonder
if any of us are going to skate today. I start thinking about how our group has all progressed
a lot recently, and it's a cool feeling. Everyone is learning new things and improving a lot.
Andrew said about how after coming back to skating the last few months how much he loved
skating again but mainly because he's been able to hang out with us all more since moving
back into town. Likewise, Jordan, Jay, and I were talking about how we've been able to skate
way more due to the better weather, mentioning that its cool that we have been able to
skate together a lot since people have moved back and Lucas is out of injury. We also
mention how much we have been out recently, like 3 or 4 times a week.

   This extract shows how the community spirit in our skateboarding group is the real driving force behind our love of skateboarding. As we have all been able to skate more together, we have all been enjoying it so much more. During sessions in which many of the group are present, we often refer to how good a session it is when everyone is around. Here then, skateboarding's community focus is recaptured whilst the previous desires of improvement and the like become side-lined. Improvements are happening still however, and this has been mentioned and discussed by the group, but the pull of this improvement is that we have been able to do it together rather than against one another, echoing Beal's (1998) early notion that skateboarders are there to skate with, rather than against, one another. I thus return now to my earlier notions of jouissance as it manifests through skateboarding. As argued in Section 2.3.7, in the case of sport, this refers to the positive emotions one experiences when participating in physical activity and is associated with feelings of pleasure, liking and fun. In the neoliberal context, sport has been transformed into a practice based on elite participation and competitive individualism, directing the emotional dimensions of sport down a specific path. As Chapter 5 showed however, skateboarding refuses to follow this path. Indeed, as the above diary entry shows, improvement in our skateboarding was ultimately not about besting one another. Instead, it was more simply about being 'stoked' for one another, similar to the skateboarders in broadcasted Olympic events, who were constantly cheering each other on and congratulating one another despite the competitive system they were situated in. Grassroots skateboarding thus also shows resilience towards neoliberalisation through a mode of jouissance that is built around comradery and a shared love for the act of skateboarding.

   Wednesday 27ᵗʰ July: Today I watched the Olympic women's street final with some friends.
   We all agreed it was the event that we enjoyed watching the most because it had some
   really creative tricks in it that we had never seen before in competition. The skill level wasn't

as high too which made it more relatable, because we could appreciate the struggles of the
tricks a lot more. This got us really hyped to skate so afterwards we went to the skatepark
and tried to do loads of new more creative style of tricks. It was also a really sunny day. We
agreed it was one of the most fun sessions we have had in a while and there was a really
good vibe at the park.

In this later extract, we once again get excited to skate through an interaction with this
neoliberalised form of skateboarding. Rather than being inspired by the competitiveness inherent to it
however, as a group, we become inspired through the breadth of creativity showcased at the event
by the participants as well as the struggles that we saw during falls or failed attempts that we could all
relate to. In this way, the triumph of process over product inherent to skateboarders' jouissance
becomes clear, as does the shared experience of the session with reference to the positive emotions
circulating at the park. It is thus a collective embodiment of enjoyment, transgressing the competitive
nature of neoliberal sport that orientates all activity towards productivity.

6.6.2: Joining a new Community

Saturday 15th October: Since I have been injured, I've been thinking a lot about how I am
probably going to lose a lot of the tricks I have been putting work into over the recent
months since I started practising them a lot more. Also the weather is going to get worse
now so even if a heal up soon I will not be able to skate as much.

In this extract, I am referring to an injury that I obtained in mid-August (not from
skateboarding) that has stopped me from skating completely. The worries I was experiencing
were very real at this time and I was annoyed that the work I had been putting into my skating
was going to be made redundant after not practising for so long. There is thus some overhang
of my more neoliberalised style of skateboarding that began to develop from December in the
previous year, showing some ebs and flows in skateboarding's resilience.

Wednesday 16th May: The last few sessions have been good, my ankle is feeling fine again
and I can skate like normal. I have had to catch up with myself though and re-learn a lot of
stuff. What has been really fun though is showing up at the new local park, getting to know a
new group of skaters and just being outside and on the board way more often. Hoping to
keep this up, get there more regularly and continue this. I realise that I have really felt less

like a skateboarder since then and have missed connecting with other people through
skating.

This entry refers to one of the first few times I was able to skate again following four months of physiotherapy for rehabilitation of my injury. During this time, I had moved house to Southeast London away from the group I have been thus far referring to and was unable to skate until early May. The negative feelings I refer to here then are based around a loss of my identity due to my lack of ability to skate and be part of a community at my local skatepark. As I was able to begin skating again, I began to realise what I had missed so much, and this was not just about not being able to skate as well as before the injury, but about actually being able to participate, have fun and enjoy skateboarding, connect with others, and celebrate my identity as a skateboarder in a wider community of skateboarders. This final extract re-states the relevance of process over product and comradery in skateboarding and that despite any wavers towards a more individualised and competitive form of skating, jouissance in skateboarding will always remain a hopeful example of resilience.

6.6.3: Perceived Positives of the Games

Such resilience and maintenance of the various aspects of skate culture does not mean that skateboarders are actively pushing back at the Olympic Games however, hence the argument that this is resilience and not resistance. Indeed, in many cases, skateboarders see and support the benefits that the Games can bring to skateboarding. As Lombard (2010) writes, skateboarders will often concede parts of their culture to trade for better conditions and remuneration. For this reason, skateboarding is both in and outside of mainstream. It does contain practices and beliefs that are at odds with conventional ways of life, yet simultaneously subsumed within them, and in many instances tolerant of them (Yochim, 2010). In what follows, I show how the resilience of skateboarding is tied to an acceptance of its newly obtained status as an Olympic sport, praising the benefits that this may bring.

During a conversation with one skateboarder at Harlow skatepark in Essex, for example, we begin talking about the Olympics and the establishment of governing bodies in the world of skateboarding. He notes that at first, he was originally sceptical towards the presence of governing bodies within skateboarding as '*it's skating you know?*', referring to skateboarding's roots in DIY culture. As time went on however, and Skateboard GB began to make visible contributions to skateboarding, like helping members of the local scene secure permanent permission from the council for their DIY sport

'Rubble' (stylised 'RBL'), his opinion had changed, leading him to think that the Games could create some long-needed benefits such as formal recognition by urban managers. This spot is made by a handful of local Harlow skateboarders and used regularly, with new obstacles frequently being built for the last three years or so. It was noted that Skateboard GB contacted the local council and attempted to highlight the social and cultural importance of this space. They noted that if they continue to help grassroots skateboarding in the way they have helped the Harlow skaters, then governing bodies are valuable to have. Towards the end of the conversation, he praised my project, noting that it must feel good to be part of the Olympic story and gaining more recognition for skateboarding, again showing his positive responses to the Games.

As well as the potential of a formalised governing body creating legitimacy for grassroots skateboarders, another theme that came up was the potential for skate shops to become more economically viable and the expansion of career opportunities. As one skateboarder at Southbank mentioned, the Olympics may be a positive for skateboarding since there may be new opportunities for sponsorship, which she noted was difficult at present because '*you have to do something literally crazy on Instagram to get noticed*', talking here about posting videos of tricks online in order to gain recognition. As well as this, she mentioned that it would be great to have more skate shops as a result of increased demand following increases in popularity, and then remarked how this could mean there are more local shop skate teams since the shops may be able to afford this post-Olympics. Here then, the benefits are seen to be things that directly support grassroots skateboarding, creating more economic opportunities for skateboarders.

During this conversation, there were some discussions on potential negatives too. One of these was how skateboarding's increased popularity could drive equipment prices up. There was also wariness on how skateboarding could in the long term '*become more like football*', with the creation of leagues and similar tropes which would further turn skateboarding into a competitive sport. In this sense, the perceived negatives are things that would damage skate culture, inverting its anti-competitive nature. These sentiments were also reflected during a conversation following a group viewing of one of the Olympic skateboarding events:

> J: *I just see it kind of 50/50, it might inspire more people to skate, but I just don't want it to be more competitive basically.*
> P: *Yeah, cus that's not what it's about.*

L: *At the end of the day, for people like us, if they build more skateparks because of the result of this then this is a good thing innit.*

J: *If it makes skateboarding better as a whole in the UK then yeah go for it.*

L: *Yeah, it would be a hard push to make skateboarding worse. No one is gunna be like nah its shit if they are getting a new park, you know what I mean like more funding.*

R: What do you mean better?

J: *Well if it becomes sort of mainstream, I guess there will be budgets for parks, people will wanna make training facilities, so I suppose for that its great but I don't just want it to be like not a lifestyle thing anymore basically.*

L: *Yeah, like you can be an Olympian through skateboarding and that's sick.*

As Beal and Ebeling (2019) note however, female-presenting skateboarders tend to be less critical of skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games due to the potential it has to normalise their presence in the skate community and the opportunities it has created in terms of media exposure, sponsorship deals and career opportunities. This is also reflected in the research through conversations with female skaters. During a conversation with one skateboarder for example, they noted that the increase in young girls' interest in skateboarding is one of the main benefits that the Games brings. Here, the reinforcement of competition or a loss of skateboarding culture and lifestyle was not seen as equal to the increasing opportunities for young girls. Likewise, one female skater at Harlow skatepark, who often attends events run by Girl Skate Cambridgeshire noted that the Games has helped more and more girls pick up skateboards and become more confident to present themselves as skateboarders. For her, the hope is that there will one day not have to be platforms for female skateboarders like Girl Skate Cambridgeshire, but that women will be as equal a part of skateboarding as men as a result of the increasing exposure that female skateboarders will get following the Games.

Another female skateboarder spoken with mentioned how there is such a big community of girl skaters that connect through Instagram now and that she had made many more female friends through this platform than in physical sites of skateboarding. She added that that seeing so many female skaters following the Olympics, specifically referencing Sky Brown in British media, has really given a sense of excitement in this community, and they feel as though they can really make skateboarding their own.

The increased inclusion of women and girls in skateboarding is not so much a maintenance of skateboarding's values, but a reorganisation of them, and a furthering of the community values that it is said to hold through making more space for diversity within skate culture. The benefits for inclusivity were often understoof by participants as more important than any potential losses of 'authenticity' within skateboarding. Similarly, the above NPSOs noted that they had seen increases in girl skateboarders since skateboarding's inclusion and that this is a key benefit for grassroots skateboarding that the Olympic Games has led to.

Everyday skateboarders are thus in many instances accepting of the Olympic Games, and welcoming of its potential benefits. In this sense then, skateboarding is a culture that is constantly negotiated in discussion with the community and its relation to commercialisation (Yochim, 2010). In requiring benefits in return however, skateboarders show another instance of resilience in the face of change, adapting to it in ways that seek to maintain their culture and its characteristics, but not necessarily pushing to change the context that they are adapting to. Here skateboarders understand the positives of the Olympics in ways that resonate with the values of grassroots skateboarding, namely more opportunities to skate, and greater support for the viability and legitimacy of grassroots skateboarding in both a political and economic sense. As shown throughout this chapter and those before it, skateboarders have in many ways made the Olympics their own, reaping it for the benefits that it can bring to skateboarding in ways that place their understandings of what skateboarding should be first. As many skateboarders noted throughout the research, including the NPSOs outlined above, the everyday nature of skateboarding at the grassroots will not change a vast amount, and skateboarders will continue their practice in ways that de-emphasise competition in favour of community and more importantly, fun, despite its inclusion into the Olympic Games. Importantly, the Games also has the potential to push grassroots skateboarding where it has previously failed in terms of gender inclusivity. At its core, skateboarding is supposed to be about community and inclusivity, yet it is much more accessible to cis-male skaters than it is for any other. As such, on these terms, the Games can help skateboarding further realise its claims to community.

6.7: Conclusion

As a result of its inclusion into the Olympic Games, skateboarding is becoming neoliberalised. As shown in this chapter, despite skateboarding's perceived anti-institutional style, the discourses that the Olympic Games serve to relay are influencing grassroots skateboarding. In the case of grassroots skateboarding NPSOs, these organisations are having to use the legitimisation provided by

skateboarding's status as an Olympic sport to better show their worth to their local urban managers. The organisations are situating skateboarding within the category of elite sports, which in turn contributes to the wellbeing of the neoliberal city. Since skateboarding as an Olympic sport can be characterised as productive and rational, it makes sense in the context of the neoliberal city (John and MacDonald, 2020), whereas skateboarding as it occurs naturally in the urban environment goes against the logic of economic production (Borden, 2019a). If governmentality is about setting the parameters of existence then (see Section, 2.5.1), the NPSOs need to associate themselves with the Olympic Games exemplifies its presence and effects.

Likewise, as shown through the autoethnographic data from my time in my local skate scene, encounters with the Olympic Games led to a situation in which our skateboarding temporarily came to resemble a more rationalised form based on performance maximisation. After conversations regarding the desire to improve our skateboarding, we attempted to essentially 'train' ourselves to get better, seeking some measurable outcome. This can also be read as the effects of skateboarding as a mode of governmentality, neoliberalising our approach to skateboarding. This chapter thus follows on from the genealogical element of the earlier Foucauldian discourse analyses, which aims to show the effects of discourse, showing how these discourses are neoliberalising skateboarding practice at the grassroots.

Nevertheless, the key word here is 'temporary', and our desire to improve for our own sake quickly dissipated and was forgotten about. Instead, reflections were made on how being able to skate together and improve together were the defining features of our time spent skateboarding. In this way, skateboarding is resilient, and whilst it is constantly being commercialised in new ways, skateboarders are always quick to respond, working to maintain its core cultures and lifestyles, whether consciously or not (Schweer, 2019). Moreover, as my diary entries show, despite any ebs and flow in skateboarding to and from a neoliberalised version of its practice, there is a constant re-appearance of the underlying jouissance inherent to skateboarding that makes the practice so unique and allows transgression of the competitive ethos of contemporary sport.

This was also shown in the case study of Death Skateboards, an independent skateboarding company, who, despite skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic Games, have no desire to follow commercial developments in skateboarding. Here, we see how the company owner works to imbue the brand with what he sees as the core ethos' of skateboarding through the way he chooses to sponsor riders and create media products. In Death, we see a disregard for competitive edge in favour

of creativity, fun and an all-around love for participation, showing that these values can live on in skateboarding despite the flattening forces of the Olympic Games.

The NPSOs featured here also show examples of such resilience. As each of the three explained, regardless of the need to use the Games to legitimise their actions, they all wish to maintain their focus on grassroots skateboarding, nurturing the conditions in which skateboarding's alternative ethos' of community and its artistic tendencies can thrive.

In this way then, grassroots skateboarding refuses to let skateboarding become a one-dimensional object of neoliberal governmentality, instead offering alternatives that are based upon the subjective arrangements that can be found within its practice and cultures through both institutional practice and through participation. Within skateboarding, we see that life's most valued attributes are not competition, winning or status, but are more simply community and satisfaction (Borden, 2019a). Skateboarders are aware of, and have a strong commitment towards, these sentiments, and often seek to preserve them with a critical eye towards anything that attempts to change them. Whilst it is argued that skateboarding does not necessarily have a set of core values that in practising skateboarding one automatically abides by (Borden, 2019a; O'Connor, 2020), it is the case that skateboarders work to generate such values through their cultures and practices, constantly responding to the forces that work to control and contain it in order to maintain their understanding of what skateboarding should be. Indeed, skateboarding is always open to interpretation. As Yochim (2010: 179) writes, 'you do it together, and everyone just does it their own way'. For Borden (2019a: 3) such 'diversity is not a weakness for skateboarding, but conversely its very strength'.

As shown here at each level analysed, there were specific understandings of what skateboarding was to them, and it was these that went on to inform their actions and responses to the Olympic Games. Whilst there are commonalities across the board that skateboarding should be based around fun, community, and a love for participation, it is through practice that these come into being. On the other hand, neoliberalism works to create a specific future, organising all activity through market logic and reducing individuals to autonomous and competitive units. In this way then, within skateboarding we can find the generation of alternative futures, bringing into being practices of collectivity through which people can work together to offer a wider set of subjectivities, enabling us to recognise points of transgression within the dominant order (MacLeavy et al., 2021).

As explained in Section 3.X, this section refers to a UK-based form of skate culture, so findings should be understood in this context. More specifically, the NPSOs are acting within their localised contexts in which skateboarding has different meanings and is used for different ends. Likewise, the ethnographic sections of the chapter refer to my time spent skating in and around London. These findings should thus not be read as a broad claim to a larger skateboarding monoculture, but as examples of the power of skateboarding communities to develop strategies of reworking the world in which neoliberalism serves to reduce communities to isolated individuals through community-led and ground-up initiatives. This chapter shows that within skateboarding, one can thus find a new set of political possibilities and openings.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1: The Great Unknown

And so to conclude, I wish to contextualise these political possibilities with the help of some refreshing thinking from outside of the academy. At the time of writing this conclusion, I had just finished reading Rou Reynolds' (2021) *A Treatise on Possibility*. Reynolds is the lyricist and frontman of the multi-genre alternative band Enter Shikari. The band have a long history of using their music as a form of critique, targeting a vast array of issues including, but not limited to, Arctic oil drilling, colonialism, authoritarianism, free market economics, privatisation of health care, and the disregarding or twisting of scientific evidence for political purposes. A *Treatise on Possibility* is an interdisciplinary and extensively researched companion guide to the band's 2020 album *Nothing is True & Everything is Possible*. In it, Reynolds argues that humanity currently finds itself at what he calls 'The Great Unknown'. Defining this, he draws on Toby Ord's (2020) concept of 'the precipice'. Ord (2020) argues that humanity currently stands at a precipice. In the last 100 years, humans have invented nuclear weapons, caused irreversible climate change, and engineered deadly pandemics. Humanity now has the very real potential to destroy itself. These developments have happened so rapidly that Ord (2020) argues that humans, as a species, have not been able to catch up in evolutionary terms and are thus without the wisdom to ensure that we do not do so. We simply have never been in this position before, and so have overtaken our ability to use and administer our technological advancements morally, ethically, and rationally.

Reynolds (2021) outlines four systems of influence that have caused this dilemma:

- A social atmosphere for disaster: caused by the current breakdown in productive public conversation, caused by political polarisation, social media's tendency to facilitate anger, societal distrust, and a distrust in democracy itself.
- An environment for disaster: the increasing problems of climate change, species extinction, social destabilisation, rising inequality, and antibiotic resistance.
- An arsenal for disaster: the threat of nuclear war, leaps in artificial intelligence, nano- and biotechnology.
- A framework for disaster: the root cause of all the above, a global economic system that is oblivious and detached from the welfare of humanity. The demand for constant growth and unwavering faith in the ability of the free market and its 'freedom' to solve all issues.

But humans are capable of greatness and of survival. Look at our ever-increasing medical capability, the increases in the practicality of renewable energy sources, our capacity for artistic practice and creativity. We should have positive expectations about our capability for progress, but humanity's creative potential is held back by our socio-economic system. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made this crystal clear through its disruption of the smooth running of contemporary capitalism. During this time, we have seen a range of realities come to the foreground. State-led programmes of emergency response increased in prominence. Socialist-leaning policies have been imposed such as the UK's furlough scheme. Nationalised healthcare was celebrated like never before whilst the nationalisation of broadband seemed increasingly feasible (Mould, 2021). Most tellingly however, examples of mutual aid were apparent across the country, showing the real potential of humanity to come together and support one another in times of collective crisis (Mould et al., 2022). But the way society is structured at present brings out the worst in us, it actively inhibits these things. Since the decreasing relevance of COVID-19 in public policy however and the supposed 'return to normal' we have witnessed over 2022, this seems to have reversed. The current 'cost of living' crisis that is ongoing at the time of writing shows this. It is a consequence of a profit-over-people mindset that permeates society. At this point, the question becomes: will humanity overcome its intra-species division, power struggles and hostility and learn to employ its technologies peacefully to build a better future, or will it simply destroy itself? The Great Unknown is thus an ultimatum, it refers to the possibility of humanity either failing or flourishing as we now have the unprecedented ability to go either way.

Musing on The Great Unknown, and in the song of the same name, Reynolds (2021) asks:

'Is this a new beginning, or are we close to the end?'

7.2: Crossing the Rubicon

We stand at The Great Unknown, so what happens next?

We must cross the Rubicon.

This phrase refers to Julius Caesar and his army's risky crossing of the Rubicon river in early 49 BC. At this time, the river was the northern boundary of Italy, and by bringing his 13th legion across it,

Caesar was making a declaration of war towards Rome. The phrase now refers to an individual or group who commits to a risky and unalterable course of action.

In the centuries since the industrial revolution, our carbon-intensive, fossil-fuelled lifestyle and allegiance to the short-term profit motive have set us on a very risky course indeed. Climate science shows that if we maintain this industrial path, we are very likely to reach several climatic tipping points in this century. A tipping point is defined as a moment in which a large-scale and long-term change in climatic state is inevitable as a result of gradual perturbations over time (Lenton, 2011). Climatic systems under threat of this include the Amazon rainforest, various boreal forests the Greenland ice sheet, the West Antarctic ice sheet, El Niño/Southern Oscillation, and Monsson seasons in both Africa and India (*Ibid.*). Changes in each of these can push us towards a global tipping point, committing to irreversible changes that affect the entire planet (Lenton et al., 2019). As a recent IPCC (2022) report shows, we may see spiralling temperatures, rising sea level, drought, more extreme weather events, coral bleaching, and many other great risks that will be catastrophic for so many.

Can we avoid crossing this Rubicon? If so, humans must act now. We, alive right now, are pivotal. We are amongst the last few generations of this who have the ability to prevent irreparable damage to our planet. We must find and take the necessary solutions to prevent amplifying this positive feedback loop of destruction. In other words, we must cross our own Rubicon. The window of opportunity is narrowing. As Reynolds (2021: 90) puts it, 'we must reform, redesign and reimagine like never before', pushing us onto a path in which compassion for one another and our planet takes the lead and from there, we must never look back.

7.3: Hope

How do we achieve this? If neoliberalism, the very system that brings out our worst, is becoming ever more pervasive throughout society, how can we find an alternative? An important answer lies in hope. If neoliberalism is characterised by a dedication to transform all aspects of social life into marketised and transactional elements, making it increasingly hard to find alternative forms of organisation, we must work hard to identify the spaces that show resilience to this process. The only way things will get better are if we harness our abilities for analysis, communication, compassion, and cooperation. These will never blossom within a marketised society. Through its focus on individualised competition, neoliberalism cannot deliver a safe and sustainable future. If we are to confront the abyss, we must look at our predicament head-on. Throughout this thesis, I have referred to 'spaces of

hope'. Hope is an active desire for progress. In order to act, one must have some belief that their action will have some possible worthwhile effect. They must thus have hope. Hope is motivating, and it is the fuel for change. Going back to Reynolds (2021: 83, original emphasis), within spaces of hope, 'we can stoke the warm fires of compassion, cooperation and creativity *ourselves*, and we can then redesign the systems that diminish those constructive human drives, or at least distract us from them. Hope doesn't say that change is inevitable, or even probably, it simply says it is *possible*'. If we look to these spaces then, we can find the tools to reorganise society, redesigning its principles and fostering a collective world that is not centred around individual prosperity at the expense of others.

7.4: What About Skateboarding?

It seems I have strayed slightly from the objective of this thesis, so let us return to skateboarding. Whilst reading *A Treatise on Possibility,* I couldn't stop thinking about the relevance of its central arguments to skateboarding. I am not going to argue that skateboarding alone is how we will prevent climate catastrophe or reverse the insidious tendencies of the neoliberal social order, but it *does* provide us with a space of hope. It is a small but important piece of the puzzle in the fight against neoliberal injustice. There are other such examples, the rise of mutual aid in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mould et al., 2022), for example, or communal squatted settlements (Vasudevan, 2014). These give examples of collective and compassionate forms of politics, identity, and citizenship (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Even other alternative sport practices can assist in this mission. If we must foster and practice collectivity and cooperation then, it is to these spaces we must look. In the same way that neoliberalism tends to appear in complex and contingent spatialised manifestations (Springer, 2010), spaces of alternative organisation are likewise contextually specific. They are not a one-size-fits-all solution, but work across different times and spaces to show creative and various alternative visions that provide us with a source of inspiration and hope in ways that are unique to each community (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006).

In a way, skateboarding is at its own Great Unknown, and is confronted with its own tipping point and Rubicon. Never has skateboarding been at the point it is now, on the edge of being subsumed by the neoliberal model of sports or continuing to provide spaces for alternative and anti-capitalist organisation. Let us see the arguments for each case, as made throughout this thesis:

7.5: The Neoliberalisation of Skateboarding

Following skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympics, the practice is becoming neoliberalised. This is to the detriment of its potential to offer more egalitarian forms of collective and communal social organisation. Specifically, its central themes and characteristics are becoming transformed through the lens of the free market and the supposed benefits of competition and individualism. This was explored through the first three of the project's research questions. I return to these below:

- What institutional processes are occurring within skateboarding's governance as a result of the Olympic Games and how are these working to introduce neoliberal logics into skateboarding?
- What type of media product does such governance serve to create, and how is this involved in the production and dissemination of neoliberal discourse?
- How do the neoliberal discourses produced by skateboarding's inclusion into the Olympic system affect the grassroots?

Chapter 4 answers the first of these, using policy discourse analysis and in-depth interviews with representatives from World Skate and Skateboard GB. Since these organisations are now part of the OM, they must rework skateboarding along the ideological lines of the Olympic Games, transforming it into a specific theoretical formulation with its own set of meanings and knowledges that define what the practice is and how it is done (Liao and Markula, 2009). Following a Foucauldian discourse analysis, Chapter 4 showed how the concepts and meanings that these governing organisations are introducing into Olympic skateboarding through critical attention to their policy decisions, and the sites at which these were discussed were understood as 'enunciations'. Through the introduction of qualification, judging and ranking systems, competition networks and training programmes, the organisations are introducing neoliberal sporting concepts into Olympic skateboarding. This includes: 'quantification', 'ranking', 'rivalry', 'success', 'failure', 'performance-based rewards', 'strategisation', 'performance maximisation', 'elite participation', 'the power of the individual', 'progression through competition' and finally a supposed sense of 'equality of opportunity'. Together, these concepts form a theoretical formation, referring to the coalescence of concepts into the discourses that structure the field, designating it as a shared field of knowledge with specific meanings. The theoretical formation here is thus one that renders Olympic skateboarding a competitive sport, exemplifying the neoliberalisation of its internal logics. From there, these discourses must be connected to the wider context in which they are situated, allowing researchers to make clear the various forms of power

that permeate society and the channels that they take. From a genealogical perspective then, these discourses are involved in the creation and maintenance of a wider neoliberalised way of life, normalising its tendencies within sport and thereby throughout the social realm. Ultimately, this serves to benefit the well-being of the market, orientating all human activity towards this.

As geographical scholarship has shown, such processes of neoliberalisation are not uniform in their intricacies (Anderson, 2017a; Springer, 2010; Peck and Tickell, 2002). This was made apparent in Chapter 4 by the use of in-depth interviews, which showed how both World Skate and Skateboard GB are playing to the traditions of skate culture, which I have categorised as a method of gaining legitimacy within skateboarding. As mentioned, this is crucial in skateboarding due to the general wariness of skateboarders towards outside interference in their culture and practice (O'Connor, 2020; Lombard, 2010). In this way, the conventions of grassroots skateboarding are absorbed into the neoliberal sport system.

Chapter 5 then answers the second of these questions. It shows how the work of skateboarding's governors ends in a televised media product that presents competitive sport at its peak. This chapter makes further use of Foucauldian discourse analysis, this time using the BBC's televised broadcasts of the Olympic skateboarding events as an object of analysis, to show again the types of concepts this type of sport works to introduce. Through a critical examination of the event format and the commentators' and studio hosts' ways of speaking about the participants' actions, emotions, and the wider contexts they situate these within, the chapter shows the various media techniques used to render Olympic skateboarding as a spectator product (Vamplew, 2018). They narrativise the on-screen events, and frame them in a specific way (Barnfield, 2013; Morissette, 2014). Through these techniques, understood for analytical purposes as enunciations, many concepts are again introduced. This includes some repeated concepts from Chapter 4, but this time appearing in a different setting. These were: 'quantification of performance', 'ranking', 'performance-based rewards', 'rationalisation', 'performance maximisation', 'elite performance', 'success', and 'failure'. Through a focus on individual athletes however, many new concepts were introduced here. These included: 'individualism', 'productivity', 'training', 'dedication', 'pressure to succeed' and 'resilience'. Once more then, these concepts come together to further Olympic skateboarding as a theoretical formulation that neoliberalises our understanding of skateboarding. It is shown to be a practice in which each of these concepts play a salient part, with each one being a key traditional characteristic of neoliberalism. These thus serve as a genealogical formation that is once more connected to the wider relations

embedded within neoliberalism, characterising skateboarding as another site at which ideas of competition and individualism are reinforced.

Chapter 6 turns to the 3rd question around the grassroots of skateboarding, including interviews with a group of NPSOs, an independent skater-owned brand, and an ethnographic exploration of everyday skateboarders from a variety of skate scenes in and around London. It thus shows how skateboarding's inclusion into the Games affects and relates to grassroots skateboarding at a range of levels. Firstly, it shows the impact that governmental discourse created by skateboarding's inclusion is having on three British skateboarding NPSOs. Here, these organisations are having to present themselves in line with neoliberal sport discourse in several ways, using the status that the Olympics gives to skateboarding to make their organisations fit the context of neoliberal sport, showing that it is a productive, healthy, and beneficial activity. This highlights how systems of objective truth are created and go on to define the reasons that sport should be done. In this way, skateboarding's new status as an Olympic sport is something that has significant material effects in everyday life. In terms of everyday skateboarders, Section 6.6. shows my own and other skateboarders' practices of skateboarding were also altered following encounters with Olympic skateboarding. Here, after viewings of the events, as well as discussions around how participants in the events are judged and trained, a few others and I were found to be thinking of our own skateboarding along these lines, using sessions to 'train' ourselves by noting what tricks we had or hadn't been doing as well recently, what areas of the park we do not use as much, and just generally identifying areas for improvement. This likewise shows the effects such forms of sport can have on everyday practices, and how the neoliberal messages created by these sports can alter these in such a way as to make others follow them.

Together then, these show in real time how through the inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympic Games, the practice is becoming increasingly used to create market-based discourse centred around competition and the primacy of the individual. In turn, it works as a mode of neoliberal governmentality. Indeed, as Beal (1998) writes, by structuring popular culture activities in ways such as the above, those social values are legitimised to the point in which they become taken-for-granted assumptions, contributing to the hegemony of neoliberalism in everyday life. A central tenant of neoliberalism is the freedom and liberty of the individual, thus vindicating individual rights and offering protection against the perceived threat of the government towards these (Lomasky, 2002). As Spence (2015) argues however, this is not about liberty at all, but a wider process of subjectification and governmentality in which market logics become integrated into everyday norms

and values, with all action becoming orientated towards individualised market-led outcomes and the undercutting of community power. The end point of this is the incorporation of individuals into a social order that offers a false promise of freedom, breaks down collective solidarity, and instead serves the interest of the market and therefore the maintenance of class power amongst the economic elite (Harvey, 2007).

7.6: Spaces of Hope within Skateboarding

On one hand then, skateboarding is at risk of losing what makes it so special. It appears to be approaching a tipping point whereby the continued neoliberalisation of the practice is organising skateboarding through individualistic and competitive means. Indeed, as Beal and Ebeling (2019) write, the threats of sportification are very real. As I have argued throughout the thesis, the increasing pervasiveness of neoliberalism in everyday life in this way makes alternative forms of organisation harder to image and even harder to enact. But at this Great Unknown at which skateboarders currently stand is another option, just as there is for humanity's fight against the forces of neoliberal capitalism. I address this with my fourth research question:

- How are skateboarders showing resilience to these processes of neoliberalisation, and what alternative ways of organisation does this offer?

This question was explored first in Chapter 5. It showed that notions of community, comradery, and a shared enjoyment of the act of skateboarding rather than the products of it remains within skateboarding despite its appearance at the Olympic Games. Indeed, in the events, there were multiple mentions of how the competition was not the defining feature of the event, but more an opportunity in which all participants could create a shared experience of skateboarding, supporting one another, and cheering each other on. This was explored through Barthes (1975) concept of jouissance, through which positive embodied emotions of enjoyment, pleasure, and elation are achieved, lifting the subject out of the constraints of existing systems of domination and oppression. Through the triumph of process over product and comradery, the participating skateboarders offered counter-discourses, explored again through a Foucauldian discourse analysis. 'Comradery', 'empathy', 'shared experience', 'friendship', and 'enjoyment' were the concepts that emerged through their practice, destabilising attempts to transform skateboarding into a neoliberalised theoretical formation. In this case, skateboarding becomes a genealogical formation that is based not on the

reinforcing of neoliberalism, creating an alternative social context that shows us how we should be constructing our societies.

The question was then explored further in Chapter 6. Indeed, at each level of analysis at the grassroots, significant examples are resilience can be found. Firstly, as for the three NPSOs, each of these maintained a strong commitment to their community-based and egalitarian practices in such a way that disregards traditional neoliberal sport motifs. Despite attaching themselves to the Olympic skateboarding narrative, these organisations are still working to highlight skateboarding's diversity and artistic tendencies, attempting to open skateboarding up to a wide range of participants. They work to show that the practice can be interpreted in a whole range of ways and hosting non-competitive events, art exhibitions, film making and photography events that all show that skateboarding is formed by skateboarders through bottom-up interactions with one another. These can be read as a maintenance of skateboarding's core values, despite attempts to define and control the sport from above. Whilst they are not necessarily resistive, they nevertheless show how sporting practices can be structured in a community-first way.

Likewise, through a case study of Death Skateboarding (Section 6.5), this chapter shows how grassroots skate brands such as this can also capture many of skateboarding's cultural values. As an interview with company owner Nick Orecchio shows, Orecchio has distanced the brand from the Olympics, and the competitive and commercial type of skateboarding that he understands this to represent. Instead of embodying these characteristics through the brand, he instead chooses to sponsor riders that he does not see as the best in a technical or measurable sense, but ones that capture his perceived essence of skate culture. Likewise, through the brand's video releases, he attempts to show how skateboarding does not need to be serious, but is at its heart a fun DIY practice that has no pre-defined list of practices or methods.

Finally, despite practices in my local skate scene being altered following encounters with Olympic skateboarding, this style of skateboarding quickly faded away as instead, we all became more concerned with being able to skate with each other more regularly. This once more showed that skateboarding is driven by a transgressive realisation of jouissance that is based on collectivity over individualism. Whilst practices of improving were still present, these were through a lens of feeling good for others improving and how it has been fun to see us all improving as we have had more opportunities to skate. Likewise, my accounts of not skating due to injury and the subsequent

anxieties of my ability and skill level decreasing were overcome through being able to skate again and the joys of being outside and hanging out with like-minded people.

Within the spaces of skateboarding then, we can find the tools we need to ensure that we do not cross the wrong Rubicon. We find the power of communities to develop ground-up strategies of existence within an individualised neoliberal world. Through its ongoing practices, the skateboarding community constantly reinforces the values and meanings of skate culture. Through a strong commitment to its lifestyles and careful negotiations of outside interference, skateboarders have created a like-minded global community that emphasises fun, creativity, and collectivity, challenging neoliberal sport's values of individualised competition despite ongoing attempts to incorporate skateboarding into this system. In this sense, skateboarding offers ways of being that are not organised solely through their incorporation into the neoliberal sport system. Skateboarding is a resilient practice. It is a central and meaningful part of the lives of millions of its practitioners that in practising one embodies a unique world view (O'Connor, 2020). Within this lies its resilient potential, adapting to the neoliberalising circumstances of the Olympic Games in ways that seek to preserve its alternative characteristics. Through its political possibilities then, it is something that we can learn from, providing as Harvey (2001) would write, spaces of hope. If skateboarders continue to maintain their resilience, and I have presented strong evidence that they can, then we can use its norms and values as inspiration for more egalitarian futures.

7.7: Limitations

In the methodology (Chapter 3), I explained potential critiques of and limitations to the methods that I used, as well as how I have accounted for and addressed these.

When conducting the interviews, a practical issue was the exclusive use of videoconferencing platforms. In some cases, this meant flow of conversation was occasionally interrupted due to the shortened proximity to the participants homes of offices, as well as in one case interviewing a participant whilst they were a passenger in a moving vehicle, leading to signal dropouts and other frustrations. Due to the nature of these interviews, there is no remedy for this. Another significant limitation lies in issues of representation. Indeed, interviews have the potential to downplay the lived experience of the interview, since quotes are taken and arranged according to the story that the researcher is trying to tell.

This limitation sits within wider debates of interpretive research methods more generally, and as a result, this debate speaks to the rest of the methods used within this project. Within interpretive research, the researcher must account for their own positionality relative to the objects of study since this can shape the project and data. Indeed, from McDowell (1992: 409) we know that knowledge is situated. It is produced in, and thus shaped by, specific circumstances. It is therefore important for academics to take into account of the position of both themselves and the research participants. As for the interpretation of data, the researcher must realise how they themselves are involved in the processes of meaning-making, and how their involvement in this is shaped by their own lived experiences and subjectivities which may lead to contextually specific interpretations and representations of data. Realising such, the researcher must refute claims to objectivity (Berling and Beuger, 2013).

This issue thus also arises through Chapter 4's use of policy discourse analysis. Indeed, in such analysis, the researcher examines the meanings embedded within policy-relevant outputs of a decision-making body. They thus make decisions as to what those meanings are, who is making them, how and why they are being communicated, and the political implications of this (Yanow, 2007). Chapter 5's further use of discourse analysis can lead to a similar issue of a loss of attention to lived experience. This is especially the case in sport media in which the participant's actions are already commented on and therefore framed by someone else. To remedy this, I followed a similar approach to Caldwell (2020), who paid attention to how players themselves use language to exercise solidarity and power of their own. Finally, this applies also to Chapter 6's interpretation of interviews and ethnographic data. This issue applies to the latter in such that there is potential for the researcher to misinterpret the actions and dispositions of their research subjects, or indeed interpret them in line with their own subjectivities.

On the other hand, my own subjectivities benefitted this project in some important ways. My insider status within skateboarding meant I was already familiar with the research topics, and had easy access to the field. As well as this, it also meant that I have the relevant cultural competencies required to understand the dispositions of skateboarders and their culture and practice. I have an awareness of the distinctive norms, values and systems within that are required to spend time in these spaces, and was able to communicate effectively with others (Hodkinson, 2005). Moreover, as Sparkes and Smith (2013) write, it is still the case that critical social science provides the tools that allow texts to be seen in relation to elaborated general theories, which in turn allows a nuanced understanding of complex issues and meanings. Indeed, taking such an approach allows the

development of innovative methodologies which effectively align with and address the research question at hand (*Ibid*.).

Another important angle of positionality to address is the researcher's own positionality relative to the participants (McDowell, 1992). In this case, this raises some implications for gender relations within the study. Women and girls have been traditionally excluded from skateboarding due to its reliance on sub-cultural capital in which authentic participation has been embodied by risk-taking, creative and mostly white cis-gendered males, conflating gender and authenticity and serving to marginalise other groups of people, especially women, trans or queer-identifying people (Beal and Ebeling, 2019). This is true both at the grassroots and in the industry, and is made clear in this study. As a result, the majority of industry interviews were with white males, likewise for the majority of the NPSOs and for Death Skateboards. For the in-depth interviews, this led to a male-dominated sample, which was reflected in this study. Nevertheless, these interviews were important as they are largely representative of those with decision making power in the context of Olympic skateboarding. Moreover, my own status as a white, male competent skateboarder meant I had preferential access to the skateboarding scene. This issue is especially relevant to the analysis in Section 6.6, during which I detail my time in my own local skateboarding scene, and then become part of a new one after re-locating to a new area. It is important to note that this would not have been so easy for everyone. In order to account for these biases, I also included interviews with, Franics a member of the USA Adaptive Skate Committee to elevate their views on the Olympic Games and examine its effects on adaptive skateboarding. I also ensured my ethnography also included the perspective of diverse skateboarders rather than just my own.

Finally, there are some thematic limitations to any study. As mentioned, the initial research aims, and methodology were altered significantly in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was, for example, impossible to travel to Tokyo and attend the Games as was originally planned. This would have allowed a deeper understanding of how sporting events work in the live context through an 'event ethnography' (Koch, 2018), showing how sport participation is framed in the context of a stadium, the various attempts at spectacularisation that one would find therein, and the variety of relationships that this facilitates. Indeed, as Koch (2018) writes, being on the ground at such elite sporting events allows one to examine the many contingent encounters found therein that would otherwise be impossible to experience.

At such events, one is usually in the presence of a very large group, often in the tens or thousands, that forms a key part of sporting spectacles, and has its own set of implications (Rowe, 2020). Andrews (2016) for example, breaks down sporting spectacles into a range of subcategories. This includes 'embodied spectacle', referring to the accumulated understanding of and sense of familiarity with those at the event such as athletes, teams, coaches, and fans. Likewise, he refers to the 'spatial spectacle' within sport, which refers to the event location, landscape and built environment in which the sports are situated within. Attending the event itself would mean these different forms of spectacle could be examined through an ethnographic approach, showing what it means not just to watch a sporting event, but to attend one, and the differing or similar representations of sport that this creates, or how identity and sense of belonging are bound into the neoliberal sport system in a live setting.

Whilst giving rise to some limitations however, the inability to attend the event also granted this project an important strength. The media analysis that was conducted during this project in its place allowed for a valuable insight into how exactly media events are framed. This is especially important since televised broadcasts are the main way that audiences are able to view sport. By turning my attention to the BBC broadcast then, I was able to understand how neoliberalised sporting discourses are relayed to the audiences of sport. Moreover, this limitation also presents an opportunity for further research, to which I know turn to in full.

7.8: Further Research

At present, the IOC is making a clear attempt to re-brand the Olympic Games, hoping to appeal more to youth audiences in order to regain the viewing numbers that they are rapidly losing within this niche. As skateboarding continues to be pulled further into the mainstream, such as its recent addition to the Paris 2024 and LA 2028 Games, the latter of which will mark its status as a permanent Olympic sport, rather than an additional one, the tensions between its more cultural and lifestyle-based characteristics and the attempts to control, contain and market it will increase, demanding further reaction and negotiation from the skateboarding community if skateboarders are to maintain their perceived values of skate culture. Ongoing examination of this tension is important then if we are to realise the ways in which communities are working around the sites of neoliberalism. Within these spaces of adaptation and resilience, as I have argued, we kind find the characteristics we must embody in order to effectively combat the increasing neoliberalisation of everyday life.

Skateboarding is just part of this story however. Surfing was also included in the 2020 Games for the same reason as skating. Likewise, break dancing will make its debut at the Paris 2024 Summer Games, so the incorporation of these more lifestyle-based practices into the Games is an ongoing issue, and will likely be so for the following LA 2028 Games and those after it. As such, this PhD invites further critical attention to the Games over the coming years, seeking to uncover the ways in which these alternative lifestyle and cultural based activities are being incorporated into the neoliberal sports system, and the varying degrees of success in which this is occurring. Indeed, as explained in Section 1.4, a critical cultural geography is one that is concerned with the ways in which power relations manifest in our everyday lives through a myriad of spatial and temporal contexts. Through this ongoing attention to the Games then, geographers can continue to show the relevance of sport to their discipline, locating forms of power and the emergent responses to it. By doing so, we can further understand and confront the issues that such neoliberalisation creates, as well as hope to find more examples of situated alternatives. In turn, we can build our toolkit to tackle The Great Unknown, we can indeed cross the Rubicon and work to redesign our society and systems through a more compassionate and collective means.

Not only this, but from a hopeful perspective, and as shown in Section 4.6, this process is not universally negative. As Wheaton and Thorpe (2018) show, commercialisation and institutionalisation within sports can provide opportunities for gender equality since it allows for such issues to be addressed through policies that push institutions to be more inclusive of women and girls (*Ibid*.).

Skateboarding's appearance at Tokyo 2020 exemplifies this, and provided a unique platform women, girls, queer, and non-binary skateboarders who are often excluded from the grassroots of skateboarding, as well significantly underrepresented in competition environments and industry positions. As mentioned in this section, gender equality was a key concern for the 2020 Olympic Agenda, and in line with this, the skateboarding events featured an equal number of participants in both the male and female categories. As a result of this, accessibility for women was increased significantly by this commitment. Many of the participants in the female category were also very young, with a large amount being of 15 years or younger. Whilst this is on one level emblematic of women being traditionally excluded form skateboarding, it also shows the potential that the Games and the OM have to further develop accessibility and equal representation to professional skateboarding. Likewise, the power that these individuals have to inspire other young girls means that this is also already having a significant impact on the grassroots, and will likely continue to do so, opening skateboarding to a wider audience still. Whilst these benefits were outlined in this thesis, I

call here for further attention to these developments as skateboarding becomes a larger part of the Olympic Games in Paris 2024, LA 2028, and beyond as new opportunities are created within skateboarding.

The same is true for adaptive skateboarding, which, as discussed in Section 4.6.2, currently receives significantly less institutional and commercial support as mainstream skateboarding. However, with skateboarding's scheduled reappearance at the LA 2028 Games, adaptive skateboarding can become part of the Olympic programme, which is hoped to further increase recognition of the practice, create new opportunities and infrastructures needed for adaptive skateboarders around the world to share the same experience of both competitive and grassroots skateboarding. Once more then, there are significant benefits to entering institutional frameworks such as the OM. Similarly to above, this issue thus requires further attention, increasing awareness of these issues and tracking the opportunities that the Olympic Games will create for these skaters or critiquing them when they are misplaced.

Again, skateboarding stands at its own Great Unknown. It has the potential to become a neoliberalised tool for the maintenance of a market society, or it can continue to show resilience to this process, and inject elements of fun, compassion, creativity, and community throughout the spaces of neoliberal sport, opening them up to diversity and inspiration. This thesis contends that the latter should, and will, be the case.

This need not be the end, but can indeed be a new beginning.

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